



FAMOUS URDU POETS  
AND WRITERS

*Presented to* \_\_\_\_\_

*Dated* \_\_\_\_\_ *By* \_\_\_\_\_

PUBLISHED BY  
N. B. SEN, MANAGING DIRECTOR,  
NEW BOOK SOCIETY, LAHORE.

*1st Edition : 1947.*

ALL RIGHTS OF  
REPRODUCTION AND TRANSLATION  
RESERVED BY THE PUBLISHERS.

PRINTED BY  
S. A. LATIF AT LION PRESS,  
HOSPITAL ROAD - LAHORE.





Sir Abdul Qadir

# FAMOUS URDU POETS AND WRITERS

*by*

SIR ABDUL QADIR, Kt.,

*Formerly Advisor to the Secretary of State for India,  
Minister for Education, Punjab, Judge of the  
Lahore High Court and Law Member  
to the Government of India.*

*Foreword by*

Dr. SACHCHIDANANDA SINHA, D. Litt.,

*Barrister-at-Law, Editor, Hindustan Review, Patna,  
Formerly Vice-Chancellor, Patna University,  
President, Bihar Legislative Council.*



NEW BOOK SOCIETY

PUBLISHERS. POST BOX 47. LAHORE

By the same Author

(To be out shortly)

- |  |                |
|--|----------------|
| 1. Writings of Sir Abdul Qadir<br>(In Urdu—Volume I)   | ... Rs. 3/12/- |
| 2. Writings of Sir Abdul Qadir<br>(In Urdu—Volume II)  | ... Rs. 3/12/- |
| 3. Writings of Sir Abdul Qadir<br>(In Urdu—Volume III) | ... Rs. 3/12/- |

*Dedicated*

*To*

THE MEMORY OF

THE LATE SIR JOHN MAYNARD,

*who presided over these lectures, delivered during  
the period of his Vice-Chancellorship of the Punjab  
University, and from whom the author received  
great appreciation and encouragement.*





## CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
1. GHALIB AS A POET - - -	17
2. GHALIB AS A MASTER OF URDU PROSE	47
3. SIR SYED AHMAD KHAN - - -	71
4. DAGH DELHAVI - - -	88
5. AKBAR ALLAHABADI - - -	106
6. MOULVI NAZEER AHMAD - - -	119
7. MOULANA ALTAF HUSAIN HALI - -	130
8. MOULVI MOHAMMAD HUSAIN AZAD -	146
9. MOULVI ZAKA ULLAH - - -	159
10. MOULANA SHIBLI NUAMANI - - -	168
11. SHARAR LUKHNAVI - - -	182
12. PANDIT RATAN NATH SARSHAR - -	189

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Facing Page</i>
1. GHALIB - - - - -	17
2. GHALIB IN A WRITING MOOD - - -	47
3. SIR SYED AHMAD KHAN - - - -	71
4. DAGH DELHAVI - - - - -	88
5. AKBAR ALLAHABADI - - - - -	106
6. MOULVI NAZEER AHMAD - - -	119
7. MOULANA ALTAF HUSAIN HALI - -	130
8. MOULVI MOHAMMAD HUSAIN AZAD -	146
9. MOULVI ZAKA ULLAH - - - -	159
10. MOULANA SHIBLI NUAMANI - - -	168
11. SHARAR LUKHNAVI - - - - -	182
12. PANDIT RATAN NATH SARSHAR - -	189





Dr. Sachchidananda Sinha

## Foreword

My esteemed friend, Sir Abdul Qadir, scarcely needs an introduction to the Urdu-knowing public in India. My only justification for writing this Foreword to his book, which I have much pleasure in commending to readers, is the privilege which I have enjoyed of claiming his friendship for now more than half a century, and for having followed sympathetically his distinguished career in various walks of life, not only in the literary world, but also in administrative and judicial spheres. My first contact with Mr. Abdul Qadir (as he then was) was in the early nineties (1894), when he was editing a weekly journal, in English, at Lahore. It was in the office of the late Sir Muhammad Shafi (in Anarkali Bazar) that we met on the first occasion. Since then we have been the best of friends, and I have followed with great interest his highly successful career as a leading lawyer (both in the District Court and the High Court), as a public-man in the Legislative Council of the Punjab, and also its President. His work as a Minister of Education, as Revenue Member of the Executive Council, as a Member of the Public Service Commission, and of the Council of the Secretary of State for India, and later as his Advisor, constitute a record of public activities which may

well be envied, culminating as it did in his appointment as the Law Member of the Government of India. On the judicial side also he acted as a Judge of the Lahore High Court. In fact, I cannot call to mind, in my large circle of friends, any one who had placed to his credit such a record of useful public activities, both on the Executive and Judicial sides, in the administration of the country, as had Sir Abdul Qadir.

But during all these years of multifarious public activities Sir Abdul Qadir had been devoted to the pursuit and study of Urdu literature, both classical and modern. Beginning with his earliest publication ("A New School of Urdu Literature"), he had continued to take an abiding interest both in Urdu journalism and literature. His course of lectures delivered recently at the Allahabad University, and published under the title of "Urdu Language and Literature," and also the present collection of his essays on Urdu poets and prose-writers, are a conclusive proof that he has been as much, if not even a greater, votary of Urdu literature than that of Law and Administration. Perhaps what induced the publisher, Mr. N. B. Sen, to ask me to contribute this Foreword is the fact that some of the essays (brought together in this volume) originally appeared in the pages of the *Hindustan Review*—which I have edited since I founded it in July, 1900.

As a critic of the Urdu literature Sir Abdul Qadir's attitude is neither laudatory nor hypercritical, and there is much in his criticism of the prose-writers and poets which will command the

assent of unprejudiced readers. I commend this book as a careful and dispassionate discussion of the authors dealt with by Sir Abdul Qadir, for I regard it as a valuable contribution to the study of Urdu literature.

Sinha Library Road,  
Patna,

Sachchidananda Sinha.

March 31, 1947.





## PREFACE

Many years ago, the Punjab University did me the honour of inviting me to deliver a series of lectures, dealing with the lives and works of famous writers of Urdu. The latter half of the nineteenth century, with particular reference to the post-Ghalib period of Urdu literature, was selected for these lectures, as Ghalib constitutes a land mark in the history of Urdu poetry and prose.

I had undertaken to deliver twelve lectures, but nine of them had been actually delivered, when the work was interrupted by some pressing engagements of public life. A period of official duties, including four years of service in the High Court at Lahore, and five years on the Council of India in London, intervened. Shortly after my return from England in 1939, I served in Bahawalpur State for four years. The long delay in arranging the publication of the lectures was due to this succession of official engagements. In the meanwhile those who had attended the lectures or had read some of them in print, in the *Hindustan Review*, the well-known monthly journal, edited by The Hon'ble Dr. Sachchidananda Sinha, have been asking me to publish them in the form of a book. Some of those who expressed this desire were distinguished University students preparing for the I. C. S. competitive examination

in India, which included Urdu literature as one of the subjects that could be taken up.

Many other students and scholars made similar requests but the scholar who kept reminding me about the publication of these essays, as long as he lived, was the late Sir John Maynard. He attended all the lectures that were delivered in the Hall of the old Forman Christian College at Lahore. He presided over each meeting and made appreciative remarks. When he retired from the I. C. S. and went to England, he asked me to publish the lectures, and whenever I met him in England between 1934-1939, he used to enquire when the lectures would come out in book form. Out of regard for the keen interest shown in these lectures by my esteemed friend, Sir John Maynard, who was one of the ablest Vice-Chancellors we have had in the Punjab University, I am dedicating this book to his memory.

There is not much in these lectures that would add to the information of those who have studied in original the writings of the famous men of letters whose literary achievements I have described, but it has been a source of encouragement to me that many scholars of Urdu have also felt that besides giving information about the careers of the great writers and their works, these lectures have thrown some light on the peculiarities of the character of the authors concerned.

Three lectures which were not delivered at the time have been subsequently written and have been included in this collection to complete

the series. They are on Maulana Abdul Halim Sharar, Maulana Shibli Nuamani and Pandit Ratan Nath Sarshar. I have not been able to trace the lecture on Maulana Nazeer Ahmad in the form in which it was delivered and have, therefore, written afresh an account of his life and work.

The authors dealt with in this small volume do not exhaust the list of all the distinguished writers of the period dealt with, and do not include those who have helped the progress of Urdu literature from the commencement of the present century till now. They would require at least one more book of this size, which may be given to the public some time later, if circumstances permit.

A word may be added, in conclusion, to explain why lectures on Urdu literature were delivered in English. The first and the chief reason was that the medium was decided by the University authorities, when requisitioning my services for these lectures, but another reason was that it was intended, through the medium of English, to inform the non-Urdu-knowing public in India and abroad, that Urdu had a growing literature and could claim among its distinguished writers men whose careers and achievements can compare favourably with the work of their contemporaries of the same period in other lands.

3, Temple Road,  
Lahore,  
5th April, 1947.

ABDUL QADIR.



**GHALIB**

## Ghalib as a Poet

The second half of the nineteenth century has been remarkably productive of literary talent all over the world. India has been no exception. In the domain of Urdu, some of the greatest masters of modern Urdu have lived or flourished during this period, thus giving it a unique importance in the history of Urdu literature. In order to stimulate interest in the study of the Urdu language and literature, the Punjab University has arranged for a series of lectures on modern Urdu writers and I have been asked to deal with this important period. We have practically to take up the story of Urdu Literature from where Maulvi Muhammad Husain *Azad*, left it, in his well-known book the "Ab-i-Hayat." He divided the history of Urdu Literature into five periods, the last of which dealt with authors like Zauq, Momin and Ghalib of Delhi and Nasikh and Atish of Lucknow among the great writers of *Ghazal*. He also dealt briefly with the work of Anis and Dabir, the two famous writers of *Marsiya*, (elegiac poems). Some of these writers must, however, be included in the list of men whose brilliant work has adorned the second half of the nineteenth century, though the greater part of their lives

belonged to the first half. The authors are links, as it were, between the past and the present. The name of Ghalib stands foremost amongst them, as his work, both as a poet and as a prose writer, may be regarded as epoch-making. It is in his work, more than in that of any other contemporary of his, that we see the dawn of a new era in Urdu Literature. His poetry we find full of deep thought and meaning, and his prose a model of simplicity combined with elegance of style.

It is, therefore, in the fitness of things that the present series of lectures should start with a description of the life and work of Ghalib.

Like most Oriental authors, it is his *nom de plume* by which Ghalib is best known. His name was Mirza Asadullah Khan, and he came of a noble Central Asian family, which could trace its descent from the Saljuq kings. His grandfather was the first member of the family to migrate to India from Samarkand. His father, Mirza Abdullah Beg, was married to a daughter of Khawja Ghulam Hussain Khan, a Commandant in the army and a respectable citizen of Agra. Mirza Asadullah Khan was born at Agra, in the year 1212 Hijra, (1796, A.D.) and the days of his childhood were passed there. His father died while Mirza Asadullah Khan was only a child of five, and his uncle, Mirza Nasrullah Beg, who was employed in the British army as a Risaldar, undertook to bring him up. The uncle too was taken away by the cruel hands of death when the boy was only nine years of age, and then his care devolved upon the family of his mother's

parents, who were well off and who showed him every indulgence. He received his early education from Shaikh Muazzam, an eminent teacher at Agra in those days. He was still a mere youth when he came in contact with a Parsi Scholar of Persian, whose original name was Hurmuzd and who had been given the name of Abdul Samad on his conversion to Islam. This was the foundation of Mirza Asadullah Khan's taste for Persian literature, which proved of such value to him throughout his life. Hurmuzd was a well-read and well-travelled man and he stayed with Mirza Asadullah Khan for some time at Agra and subsequently for some time at Delhi. The period of his stay was, however, very short, about two years altogether. This brief contact with an educated scholar, whose mother tongue was Persian, is hardly sufficient to explain the wonderful command over that language which Ghalib afterwards displayed, but it shows how his natural aptitude in that language got a much-needed impetus in his early life and made him a profound scholar of Persian.

Mirza Asadullah Khan visited Delhi for the first time in his childhood, when he was about seven years of age, as his uncle Mirza Nasrulla Beg was connected by marriage with the family of Nawab Ahmad Baksh Khan of Delhi. He was himself married in the same family later, when he was only thirteen, and after that he made Delhi his home and lived there till his death in 1285 A.H. (1869 A.D.), at the ripe age of 73. His father-in-law, Mirza Ilahi Baksh Khan *Maruf* was a poet of no mean order and has left behind a



collection of *ghazals* in Urdu known as *Diwan-i-Maruf*. I have not read the collection in full, but a friend of mine, S. Kesra Singh, *Jahangir*, gave me some selections from it which he made from a manuscript copy preserved in the library of His Highness the Nawab of Rampur. These selections showed considerable literary merit. This contact with *Maruf* must have influenced, to some extent, the natural bent of mind of the young poet. Though the palmy days of Delhi were a thing of the past when Ghalib came and settled there, yet in the literary world, the remnants of past eminence, were, by no means, small. Among the contemporaries of Ghalib we see quite a galaxy of poets and *Mushairas* (political contests) were quite common. Ghalib had for a long time concentrated his attention on Persian and had written only Persian *ghazals* but the popularity which the Urdu *ghazal* was beginning to command attracted him towards Urdu also. His mind was so much saturated with the Persian mode of thought and his tongue was so familiar with Persian ways of expression, that his early efforts in Urdu verse were full of Persian words and idioms, mingled here and there with Urdu words. Verses of this kind could be called Urdu *ghazal* only by courtesy. With practice, however, his style improved and his later Urdu *ghazals* combine purity of language with dignity of thought and rare beauty of expression. He or his contemporaries did not realize in their life time what a great achievement the small collection of his Urdu *ghazals* was. In his letters and in his Persian *Diwan* you find reference to his Urdu

verse showing that he was proud of his Persian *Diwan* and that he did not want to be judged by his Urdu verse. He says:—

“*Farsi bin ta bi bini naqshhai rang rang,  
Biguzar az majmua-i-Urdu ki berang-i-manast.*”

(Read my Persian verse in order to see pictures of various hues. Overlook the Urdu collection which is colourless).

Little did he know that in India his name would be remembered by posterity and would achieve an undying fame through his Urdu writings and not through the Persian writings on which he prided himself. It must be stated, in fairness, to him, that his Persian *ghazals* are of a high order. Maulvi Altaf Husain *Hali*, in his valuable work, *Yadgar-i-Ghalib*, gives an appreciative criticism of Ghalib's Persian poetry and quotes the opinions of several well-known critics, according to whom Ghalib can hold his own against many of the best writers of Persian, including some of the masters recognised in Persia itself. This estimate may be regarded by some as exaggerated and by others as fairly accurate, but it is obvious that the Persian verse of Ghalib is not well-known in Persia and has had no recognition there. It has been admired in India and is still admired by the ever decreasing number of scholars of Persian in this country, but as Persian is going out of vogue in India, the fame of Ghalib as a Persian poet must decline. This illustrates the disadvantage of a talented man devoting his main efforts to the attainment of distinction in a tongue which is not the language of his country. Fortunately for Ghalib, however, his claim to our gratitude does

not rest on his Persian writings only. His Urdu *Diwan*, though very brief, compared with his Persian *Diwan*, has not only risen highly in public estimation, since his death, but will probably continue to rise with the advance of a taste for Urdu Literature. This collection consists of about 1800 lines, of which a large number consist of semi-Persian verses, which do not, after all, constitute the basis of Ghalib's real claim to greatness as a writer of Urdu, but the proportion that is left, is of such a high order that in the vast domain of Urdu *ghazals* it would be difficult to find an equal number of verses of similar merit, even in the more voluminous collections of other authors.

In order to understand the difference between Ghalib and some other writers of *ghazal* some discussion of the nature of this form of verse will not be out of place. The word *ghazal* in Arabic means "talking to women" or "talking love" and *ghazal* as originally composed, was a song consisting of stray thoughts occurring to a lover, complaining of separation, longing for union and giving expression to sensations of pain and pleasure that characterise experiences of love. A *ghazal* starts with a verse called the *Matla*, which contains two lines, the last word but one of which in the first line, known as the *Qafia*, rhymes with the last word but one in the second line. The *ghazal* closes with a verse called the *Maqta*, in which the poet introduces his name or *nom de plume*. All the verses from the *Matla* to the *Maqta* are written in the same metre and the endings of the second line of each verse, known as *radif* must

rhyme together. These restrictions have, in some ways, hampered poetical flights of fancy, but this form of verse is not without its advantages and has been very popular in the East. Some renowned Western writers too have expressed admiration for this form of poetry, and have even paid it the compliment of imitating it. But this praise is due only to the best specimens of *ghazal*, because, in its ordinary form, it is the most elementary type of versification and not at all difficult to write. The method most commonly practised by writers of *ghazal*, in the beginning, is to think of a number of rhyming words for the *Qafias* and then to think of suitable ideas in which to use those words. This artificial way of versification, in which thoughts follow words, instead of words following thoughts, is responsible for a great deal of bad or indifferent poetry in the East. The first thing which distinguishes Ghalib's *ghazal* from that of many others is that in his case words follow thought. This is apparent, among other things, from the fact that most of his *ghazals* consist of 10 or 12 lines only, unlike those of many writers who preceded him and many who have succeeded him. They seem to have thought that by writing lengthy *ghazals* they could make a show of power of versification and for that purpose they attempted several lines for one *Qafia* and sometimes wrote 2 or 3 *ghazals* in the same *Qafia* and *Radif*. These are called *Do Ghazalas* and *Sih Ghazalas*. Most of such *Do Ghazalas* and *Sih Ghazalas*, however, are nothing more than efforts at rhyming, more or less polished according to the degree of the practice of the writer and cannot

lay claim to much literary merit otherwise. Ghalib avoided this kind of writing and has actually left some *ghazals* incomplete, without any *Matlas* or *Maqtas*, probably because more verses of sufficiently good quality in that strain did not occur to him. This is as it should be. Another feature of his poetry is that thought contained in his verses is often expressed in a strikingly original manner. For instance it is a favourite theme with Oriental poets to give expression to the pangs of love, by using the metaphor of the beloved one causing injuries to the lover. Many a poet would describe plainly the kind of dagger used, the violence with which it is struck and the extent and depth of the wounds caused. This is a fancy which would strike Western readers of Urdu verse as very quaint, but it is a very common theme in the East. Ghalib, in following this tradition, adopts a manner of alluding to his injuries which is peculiarly his own. He says:—

*Nazar lage na kahin unke dast-o-bazu ko  
Yeh log kiun mire zakhmi-i-jigar ko dekhte hain.*

(Do not let people stare at the injuries inside my breast, lest the pretty and strong arm of my beloved one may catch the evil eye). He thus leaves the whole description, which others would have revelled in, to be understood by the reader, implying that the wounds are such that to look at them would at once suggest the idea of the strength of the arm that inflicted them. He brings out, in addition, the fact that as a true lover his regard for the beloved one is such that he would not, in spite of his affliction, bear the idea of the

slightest harm coming to the latter, not even as much as may be caused by the superstitious notion of the evil eye. His desire to express his thoughts in the manner in which others have not expressed them sometimes leads him to paradoxes, which he uses with great effect. For instance where he says:—

*Baske dushwar hai har kam ka asan hona,  
Admi ko bhi muyassar nahin insan hona.*

The beauty of expression of these simple words, as it is seen in the original, is very difficult to bring out in translation, but a literal translation of this verse given in English would be as follows:—

“It is not easy for every task to be easy. Even a man cannot easily be a man.” In Urdu we have two words for a man, namely *Admi* and *Insan*. The first one is taken from the Persian language and the other comes from the Arabic ; but idiomatically *Insan* has come to mean all that is good and human and manly in man. The poet, therefore, means that it is not easy for a man to be manly.

Ghalib's verses are also full of deep philosophic truths, expressed with remarkable facility, in philosophic language. He says, for instance:—

*“Hai gaib-i-gaib jisko samajhte hain ham  
shahud,*

*Hain khwab men hanoz jo jage hain khwab men.*

“It is the absence of absence, which we call manifestation.

Those who have awakened in a dream are still dreaming.”

Though a Mussalman and a believer in the

doctrines of the faith in which he was born, Ghalib's bold and philosophic spirit has not remained unaffected by the scepticism of some of the advanced free-thinkers whom Islam has produced from time to time. There is a school of thought which is not inclined to accept, in a literary sense, the beautiful and glowing pictures of the Gardens of Paradise found in some Muslim religious books. Ghalib boldly expounds this view, in a line which is very commonly quoted and has passed almost into a proverb.

*Hamko malum hai jannat ki haqiqat lekin,  
Dil ke khush rakhne ko Ghalib yeh khiyal  
achha hai.*

"We know what paradise is in reality, but  
O Ghalib!

It is a fine idea to keep one's heart  
happy."

It has been stated above that Ghalib was an eminent Persian poet first and a great Urdu poet afterwards. His long practice in the use of Persian turns of expression adhered to him throughout his life and though in the earlier stages of his Urdu versification there is too much of the Persian element, yet it cannot be denied that he has often employed Persian words and phrases with singular effect. So much so that this feature of his style is particularly associated with his name and has found a large number of imitators.

The ideals of poetry followed in the East and the West are in some respects so different that it would be difficult to say that the Indian or Persian poets were poets in the sense in which

Tennyson and Wordsworth were poets ; but it must be remembered that in the case of a man like Ghalib, if you do not find studies of nature and natural beauty and lengthy and connected descriptive poems among his compositions, it is not because he had not the gift or the talent for them, but because his lot was cast in entirely different surroundings and his opportunities were absolutely different compared with those of Western poets. I believe, that if Ghalib had been born in the West and brought up in the atmosphere in which the Western poets lived and moved his genius could have also risen to any height. Ghalib was a born poet, who not only wrote poetry but thought poetically. When I deal with his prose-writings and place before you extracts from his memorable letters, published under the name of *Urdu-i-Mualla*, I will place before you instances of his extreme tenderness of feelings and the nobility of his loving nature. His life was one of complete devotion to his art, in spite of all kinds of adverse circumstances. It was full of a noble desire to serve his friends and relatives in any way he could. It was also full of patient and resolute suffering. Though he devoted the greater part of his literary energy to the writing of *ghazals*, which was the principal kind of literary production in demand at the time, yet his high-soaring genius felt the bondage of the restrictions, which the *ghazal* imposes upon those who write it, as very irksome. He very rightly observes :—

“ *Baqadri shauq nahin sehne tangna-i-ghazal  
Kuchh aur chahie wusaat mire bayan ke liye.* ”



“The narrow dimensions of the *ghazal* are not in accordance with the extent of my desire to express myself.

A wider expanse is necessary for expressing my thoughts.”

This shows his true instinct and the cry that he thus raised, more than half a century ago, was really a cry of the succeeding generation of poets, among whom the name of my esteemed friend, Dr. Mohammad Iqbal, stands foremost. They are now giving practical effect to the reform which Ghalib desired to effect in his time. Either because there were no models of thought and expression from the West available at the time or because the conventions were too strong to be resisted, Ghalib did not go beyond the conventional line in the forms of his composition. He has written *Qasidas* in Urdu and Persian, *i.e.*, eulogies of kings and noblemen like many a poet of the olden times. He has written *Marsiyas* in Urdu and Persian (*i.e.* elegies of a religious nature on the martyrdom of Imam Hussain). He has written *Masnawis* but they are in Persian only. They show his great power in writing connected verses on a particular subject. I would quote here a translation of a somewhat lengthy passage from one of his Persian *Masnawis*, called *Abr-i-Gauhar Bar*, (The Pearl-dropping Cloud). This is an incomplete piece of work, as we are told by Hali, the biographer of Ghalib, in his valuable work *Yadgar-i-Ghalib*. He rightly says that this incomplete poem is the best of Ghalib's *Masnawis*. I do not think any apology is needed for the lengthy extract, from that poem

as it gives us an insight into the heart of the poet and sheds light on many of his sayings and doings. His life was not a life of luxury and ease, though it was not a life of absolute poverty or starvation. He was born of a good family and had heard and seen something of its past affluence. His habits were those of the gentry of his generation and he was inclined to be liberal with his money when he got any. He was, therefore, living from hand to mouth, in spite of some stipends and pensions that he enjoyed. At one time even some of these sources of income ceased and he had to suffer great hardship. Considering the aspirations which he had, his life, on the whole, passed in need and privation. Added to this was the feeling of solitude in his heart, owing to the want of a suitable companion in life. He had been married in a good family, but very early in his youth, and at a time when he could not understand what marriage meant. The marriage, therefore, seems to have remained at best a tie of duty and convention. We do not read much about the happiness or unhappiness of his wedded life in his writings, but there is an allusion half-humorous, half cynical, to his domestic life in one or two of his letters. In consoling a friend for the loss of his wife, Ghalib writes that he envies those whose wives die in their life time and facetiously observes that so far from there being any prospects of his release from the yoke of matrimony, his worthy companion in life has never had so much as a headache. This obviously is not meant to be taken literally and seems more to have been

meant to divert the thought of his bereaved friend from the loss which he had suffered. The allusion to domestic life is not, however, without its significance, when coming from a poet like Ghalib, and shows that his home life was of an indifferent nature, neither happy nor unhappy. To add to their sorrows, Ghalib and his wife had lost as many as seven children and were left without issue in their old age. To an affectionate nature this was no ordinary suffering. He and his wife appear to have lavished their pent up affection on an adopted son, but unfortunately that son too was taken away from them. The evening of his life was further embittered by various physical ailments, about which he writes to his numerous friends in a plaintive tone. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that he had taken to the solace of the cup and he wanted thereby to drown the miserable feelings which seemed to dominate his nature. He says:—

*Mai se gharaz nishat hai kis ru siyah ko  
Ik guna bekhudi mujhe din rat chahie.*

“ If I desire merriment from wine I should be regarded as a man with a blackened face. All that I want is a sort of forgetfulness of self.”

He was never anything more than a moderate drinker, though wine had come to be a daily necessity with him. As a believer in Islam he felt very often qualms of conscience regarding this habit. He is, therefore, full of constant apologetic allusions to the growth of this habit throughout his writings and in the extract the translation of which is given below, he pours forth a strong apology to his Creator for having indulged in wine:—

“I was sorrowful and wine takes away sorrow,  
what could I do, O’ Benevolent God ?

An account of wine and music and beauty and scent, should be demanded from Jamshed<sup>1</sup> and Bahram and Parvez. But not from a poor man like me, who has, now and then, temporarily blackened his face by the fire of liquor. I had no garden in which I could enjoy drinking of wine, nor a cellar in which I could store it.

“No musician to amuse me nor a sweetheart to sit by me. No fair-faced dancers ever danced before me.

There was no noise of minstrels in my courtyard.

I had many periods of privation and many a spring season without wine.

Days when rain gladdened the earth, and nights when the moon lit the sky.

Were dark in my eyes, without a drop of drink.

The cloud of the month of Bahman covered the horizon, while my earthen cup of wine remained as empty as ever.

Many a spring found me searching for the necessities of life. And the door of my house was left open, because there was nothing in it to protect.

Many a time the world has been gay with the rose and the tulip,

While I have been living moodily in my cell.

Any moments of pleasure that fell to my lot were like a dance of the half-dead.

---

1. Names of old Iranian Kings.

I never had a full measure of happiness  
according to the desire of my heart.

If I prepared a thread to make a necklace of  
pearls, the pearls broke,

And when wine was procured, my cup got  
broken.

Do not look at my dress besmeared with  
liquor,

But look at my emaciated frame.

Thou hast kept me poverty-stricken in this  
world,

But hast kept my heart a prisoner of desire.

Owing to the unpleasant life that I have had,  
Life has been like a thorn in my side.

Whenever my heart used to boil owing to my  
desires,

A cry of pain rising from my heart used to  
reach my ear.

When I will remember my continued disap-  
pointments,

My heart will not be at rest even in Paradise.

For every simple sin that thine records may  
show me to have committed,

I will cite a privation to show a desire unful-  
filled.

Then how O! God will justice be done,

If my unfulfilled desires exceed the numbers of  
sins committed by me."<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the biographical interest of the  
above lines, there is another important reason why  
I have quoted them. They serve to illustrate  
how much thought Ghalib can sometimes con-

---

1. For the original Persian verses see *Yadgar-i-Ghalib*, printed  
at Faiz-i-alam Press, Aligarh, 2nd edition, page 306-307)

dense in a single verse. In his Urdu *Diwan* there is a beautiful verse, to my mind one of the prettiest, which, in the briefest possible space, condenses all that has been said in the above extract. It runs thus:—

“ *Ata hai dagh-i-hasrat-i-dil ka shumar yad,  
Mujh se mire gunah ka hisab ai khuda na mang.*”

“ It reminds me of the number of sore spots in my heart, owing to longings unfulfilled, Do not, therefore, ask me O God! to render an account of the sins committed by me.” The verse is very pathetic. It makes such a pretty reference to the fact that the sins committed by one in his lifetime must be numerous and yet alludes in such a telling manner to the heroic struggle of feeble humanity against alluring temptations, that it cannot but charm the reader. Ever since I came across this verse it has had a charm for me and very often I have found myself repeating it. The line of thought observable in the extract just given from the Persian *Masnavi* is exactly the same. Till the publication of the *Yadgar-i-Ghalib*, however, I had not read the passage quoted above and I did not know that Ghalib had expressed the same feelings as he did in one verse, in Urdu, with such wealth of graphic detail elsewhere. I have, therefore, thought fit to place side by side these two expressions of the same idea, one of them being a model of brevity and suggestiveness, while the other is a bold and straightforward expression of the feelings that crowded themselves into the heart of the poet on

one's mind with regard to the merits of Ghalib as a poet. It may be said in fairness to Azad that, gifted as he was with a remarkable capacity for literary criticism, he could not shut his eyes to the eminence of Ghalib as a poet and has paid a tribute of praise to the genius of Ghalib in his memorable work, the *Ab-i-Hayat*. Those who know, however, that Azad has the greatest admiration for his own master, Zauk, and that there was rivalry between Zauk and Ghalib over the sovereignty of the realm of letters, cannot wonder at the fact that Azad wants to make out, on the whole, that Zauk was greater than Ghalib as a poet. Though Zauk is undoubtedly one of the greatest masters of Urdu verse and in simplicity of style and in the beauty and flow of his language has few equals; yet the trend of opinion now is that as a genius and a thinker Ghalib must be considered much superior to Zauk.

We have seen something of what Ghalib was as a poet. We may now see what he was as a man. Some people in Delhi are still alive<sup>1</sup> who have seen the poet with their own eyes in his old age and have the greatest admiration and regard for his personality. As revealed by his letters to his friends and by the reminiscences of those who had the good fortune of seeing or knowing Ghalib, he appears to have been a man of an extremely tender, loving and loveable nature. He was possessed of broad sympathies. His religious views were also characterised by a rare breadth, which even the present day gene-

---

1. This was true when this series of lectures was delivered. Alas! that is no longer the case.

ration of educated people might envy. The number of his friends and admirers was very large and he was in constant correspondence with them. His letters to those numerous friends show how full of kindness and affection he was for each one of them, and how sincerely and with what depth of affection were his feelings reciprocated by them. Among his correspondents, some were his pupils who submitted their verses to him for correction and improvement, according to the old established custom among Eastern poets. Even in his old age, when he was troubled with various infirmities, he used to take pains over this labour of love and used to correct and improve poems sent to him with a regularity and punctuality which could not, under present day conditions, be expected even from a paid master of rhetoric, who undertakes to teach by correspondence. No one informed Ghalib of his misery or sorrow without eliciting from him a suitable response and sympathy. He was willing to lend pecuniary help to a friend in difficulty, though he was not possessed of an abundance of wealth himself. He seems to have been a great lover of children, perhaps because he had none of his own. In a letter to his pupil Tafta<sup>1</sup> we read:—

“ You know Zainul-Abidin was like a son to me. He has left two children, who are my grandsons. They often come to me and trouble me in

---

1. Tafta was a remarkable man. His full name was Munshi Har Gopal Tafta. He admired his master to such an extent that he called himself *Mirza* Tafta. He has left behind a big *Diwan* in Persian. Sir Shanti Sarup Bhatnagar, the famous scientist, is closely related to him. Sir Shanti Sarup occasionally writes Urdu poems. He has probably inherited the gift from Tafta.



various ways, but I do not mind the trouble. God knows that I regard you as my son and your poems, the product of your genius, as my spiritual grandsons. When I do not get tired of my mundane grandsons, who come and interrupt my dinner when I am dining and interfere with my sleep when I am trying to sleep at noon and step on to my bed with their dusty and bare feet and spill some water here and raise a cloud of dust there, why should I get tired of my spiritual grandsons who give me no trouble."<sup>1</sup>

To show the breadth of his sympathy and his extreme freedom from any kind of racial prejudice, which is the bane of India, his relations with Tafta and other Hindu pupils and friends are the best illustrations.

There were many other intellectual Hindus of his day, who were equally favoured with Ghalib's friendship. Among them may be mentioned Munshi Jawahir Singh, *Jauhar*, who first arranged to collect and publish the Urdu letters of Ghalib and the late R.B. Piyare Lal, an eminent educationalist in the Punjab who retired from Educational Service as an Inspector of Schools, and has now passed away. The photograph of Ghalib which has been mentioned above was given by the poet to the late Rai Bahadur and was obtained by me from my friend, L. Siri Ram, M. A. of Delhi, author of the *Khum Khana-i-Javid* and a nephew of R.B. Piyare Lal.

Ghalib's broad sympathies were not confined to these instances of personal friendship with the

---

1. This is a translation of a passage in the letter to Tafta, published in *Urdu-i-Musalla* (Edition of 1899, Mojtabai Press), at Page 63.

intellectual Hindus of his day, but embraced a much larger circle.

In a letter to Tafta, Ghalib says:—

“I hold all human beings whether Mussalman, Hindu or Christian, dear to me and regard them as my brethren.”

He knew practically no differences between various Islamic sects. His writings show that he was inclined towards the doctrines of the Shia school and had a deep reverence for the descendants of Fatimah, the universally venerated daughter of the Prophet of Arabia, but he never allowed this inclination of his to mar, in any way, the smoothness of his relations with the Sunni sect, so that it is a moot point whether he belonged to the Sunni or the Shia persuasion. The fact is that he was entirely above these differences and must have disliked them. In one of the prettiest of his *Ghazals* he sings:—

*“Ham muwahid hain hamara kesh hai tark-i-rasum  
Millaten jab mit gain ajzai iman ho gain.”*

(We are believers in the unity of God. Our religion is the renunciation of convention.

The sects when they disappear become parts of faith.)

Ghalib had a legitimate pride in the nobility of his birth, which has been often expressed in verse and prose, but in his dealings with his friends and with visitors who came to see him, he was the humblest and the mildest of men. This sense of humility existed in him side by side with his great sense of self-respect and love

of independence like a true Oriental of good birth. He attached an almost fantastic value to the maintenance of his dignity.

Maulana Hali relates an interesting anecdote about this. When the Old Delhi College was founded, there was a vacancy in it for a professor of Oriental Literature. Ghalib made up his mind to apply for the appointment. He went to see a high Government official in this connection, but as he was not received by the officer on this occasion in the manner to which he was accustomed, he plainly told him that he had come with the intention of asking for the job, but had changed his mind because he was not received with the ceremony which had usually characterised his reception on other occasions. The official explained to him that the previous interviews were in his capacity as an important citizen, while now he had come to ask for a job. Ghalib replied that he thought of applying for the post in the hope that the appointment would add to the respectability already enjoyed by him, but if it was calculated to take away anything from that and to reduce his position, he would rather go without the emoluments of the post. With all this his attitude towards the British Officials was one of great regard and respect and we find numerous instances in his letters of his good opinion about them and his desire to be on good terms with them. At the time immediately following the Mutiny, owing to some misapprehensions, which were subsequently removed, he unfortunately came under a cloud. The idea was that as he had been on good terms with

Bahadur Shah, the last of the Mughal Emperors of Delhi, he must be regarded as one of his partisans. Some enemy of his attributed to him the writing of two verses, which really belonged to Zauk, and were composed at the time of the coronation of Bahadur Shah, about 1837 A.D. Those verses were merely eulogistic and quite innocent in themselves, but the person, who attributed them to Ghalib, wanted the Government to infer therefrom his intimate association with the deported ruler of Delhi. We find references in Ghalib's letters to this episode and his intense desire to ferret out an old issue of the *Urdu Akhbar* of Delhi, which had long before published the lines in question as those of Zauk. We do not know whether he succeeded in finding that issue of the newspaper or not, but we do know that he was successful in completely dispelling the suspicions that had been aroused against him of being hostile to the British Government. The suspicion, however, caused him serious loss. For a long time his family pension from Government was stopped and he was not invited to the Darbar or granted the usual *Khilats* etc., to which he was entitled. This was to him a time of great mental and pecuniary suffering, but he felt confident about his innocence, which was after all fully recognised and his *Khilat* and his pension and the honours due to him were all restored.

He was very fond of books and was an omnivorous reader. To have a sufficient provision of reading material on his book-shelf and a quantity of good wine in his godown, was, it

seems an ideal of earthly bliss in his eyes. In a letter to Mir Mehdi Hasan *Majruh*, he writes, speaking of himself in the third person, as follows :—

“Maulana Ghalib is very happy now-a-days. *Dastan-i-Amir Hamza*, a book extending over 960 pages and a volume of the *Bostan-i-Khial*, of about the same bulk, have just arrived and I have got 17 bottles of pure wine in my storehouse. I read throughout the day and drink throughout the night. Anyone who has attained this much, deserves to rank with Jamshed or Alexander.”

It is curious, however, that we are told by Hali that in spite of his fondness for books, Ghalib never purchased books to read, nor did he make a collection of them. He seems to have possessed a retentive memory in his youth and to have absorbed and digested all that he read, so that the result of his reading became a part and parcel of his being. It appears that he was a ready writer and wielded a facile pen. The greater part of his literary work was, as has already been said, in Persian. His Persian poems extended to more than ten thousand lines. His works in Persian prose occupied a much larger space. I can only mention here the names of some of them. They were *Kati-i-Burhan*, which excited a bitter controversy among the Persian linguists of his day, the *Drafsh-i-Kawiani*, the *Lataif-i-Ghaibi* and the *Dastanbo*. This last dealt graphically with his experience and observation of daily events soon after the Mutiny and had a considerable historic value. This is not the place to go into the details of his work as a writer of

Persian and I have to content myself with this passing allusion to it. It is remarkable that like many an Oriental poet, Ghalib wrote because it was his instinct to write. He was indifferent to the preservation of his own writings. We find constant references in his letters to this tendency. When his pupils wrote asking him for some of his compositions, he told them he had none of them in his possession. He says that Nawab Ziauddin Khan had been collecting his writings and had them all in his library, but the library got destroyed in the Mutiny and no trace of it was left. Another friend's collection met with a similar fate.

Whenever any of his books were published, he took great interest in their printing and wanted them to be as accurate and as well got-up as possible. He himself used to purchase a certain number of copies of those books for distribution among his friends, and this was done so liberally, in spite of his scanty means, that at the end of those distributions there was not much left in his pocket and not a single copy of the book left with him. Another noteworthy feature of his character was his frankness and candour about his personal shortcomings. In his writings in prose and in verse he frequently alludes to them. He does so in a way which shows that he is sorry for his defects, probably having an idea that any laxity on his part should not have, so far as possible, the effect of setting a bad example to others. In fact, in describing his shortcomings of religious practice he is often inclined to paint himself darker than he really

was. This is due to several reasons. In the first place it seems that the consciousness of those omissions weighed heavily upon his mind and made them appear larger in his eyes than they really were. In the second place there is the natural tendency of Oriental poets to resort to exaggeration in descriptions. In the third place he is inclined to be emphatic in expressions of humour, according to the peculiar needs of the occasion on which he utters them. For instance, he is represented as having said to a British Military Officer, when he was still suspected of being a Muslim fanatic, opposed to British rule: "I have never offered prayers in my life and I have never avoided drinking, whenever drink was available, why should then I be regarded as a Musalman and ill treated as such". All that he wanted to emphasise, in his own humorous way, was that he was too much of a latitudinarian to be a fanatic; but this saying of his would give the wrong impression that he had never offered prayers. Similarly in one of his *Rubais* (quatrains) he says:—

"Let those observe fast who have the where-withall to feast in the evening; but he who has nothing to eat when he breaks his fast, should be excusable, if he eats the fast itself, (that is, he does not keep it). This quatrain would lead one to think that Ghalib perhaps never observed the fast during the month of Ramazan. We find, however, that these were really passing phases of thought as well as of action and that very often he did offer prayers and did observe

the fast. In a letter<sup>1</sup> to *Majruh* he says :

“Have you forgotten my usual habits? Have I ever abstained from the *Tarawih* prayer at night in the Jamia Masjid during the month of Ramazan? How could I have stayed at Rampur during this month? The Nawab was insisting that I should stay. He tempted me with the prospect of the mango crop in the coming rainy season, but I managed to get away, so as to reach Delhi on the night, when the moon came out. From the very first day of the month, I have been going every day to the mosque of Hamid Ali Khan to hear Maulvi Jafar Ali recite the Quran. I come at night to the Jamia Masjid for the *Tarawih* prayers and for breaking my fast I sometimes go to the Mehtab Bagh at evening time and enjoy the cold water of that place.” Such a regularity of religious observances would put even a pious Mulla to shame. This, however, relates to the month of Ramazan when even the less religious Musalmans try to observe the commandments of their religion, but it is enough to show that Ghalib exaggerated the pictures of his indifferent religious practices, which are not to be taken too literally or too seriously, except about the time when age and infirmity practically confined him to bed in the last years of his life. In his last days he used often to contemplate and even desire death. Two years before it actually came, he felt so sure of its coming that he prophesied about it in a phrase, the letters of which, if counted according to the numerical

---

1. For reference please see page 134 of *Urdu-i-Mualla*, Edition, 1899.





Ghalib in a writing mood

## Ghalib as a Master of Urdu Prose

Ghalib's name as a poet has so much eclipsed his work and worth as a prose-writer that it is not often realised what great service he has rendered to Urdu prose and how eminent is the position occupied by him as a prose-writer. In the growth of a language it is a curious feature that progress in poetry always precedes advancement in prose. Humanity lisps as it were in numbers. The real strength of a literature, however, is often judged by the strength of its prose. Before Ghalib originated a simple, natural and fascinating style of Urdu prose, there was comparatively little of prose literature in the language, except a few books of fiction or theology and the style in vogue was very artificial and unnecessarily encumbered with Arabic and Persian words. Ghalib has not, unfortunately, left for us any book in Urdu prose on a particular subject and all that we have is the collection of his letters, but even in these samples of his off-hand and effortless writing, he shines with a lustre peculiarly his own. He writes as he would speak. He addresses his correspondents as if he was talking to them face to face. He gives expression boldly and fearlessly to the innermost feelings of his heart. He expresses his opinions freely and frankly and calls for similar frankness in reply. There is a certain



years of his life that he had acquired a wonderful mastery over Urdu prose. He was not, however, the only one among Ghalib's pupils who successfully adopted and made popular the style of their great master, but the style was adopted and more or less successfully imitated by each one of his numerous disciples and thus became the most popular and fashionable style of his period. We find Sayed Ahmed Khan, one of the most brilliant of Delhi's distinguished sons, who afterwards became so famous as Sir Sayed of Aligarh, adopting the ideal of prose writing which had been introduced by Ghalib. In fact none of the great writers who rose into eminence after Ghalib, I mean men like M. Muhammad Husain Azad and M. Zaka Ulla, to mention two only of the latter day celebrities of Delhi, could have possibly remained uninfluenced by Ghalib in the work which stands associated with their names.

The collection of the letters of Ghalib, known as the *Urdu-i-Mualla*, has been widely read and has passed through many editions. The edition that I am using for the purposes of this essay is a fairly good one. I am sorry I have not seen the earliest edition that was brought out by the admirers of the author soon after his death. They knew how fond he was of seeing his books decently printed and neatly got up. That edition may or may not have approached the ideal, but I have no hesitation in saying that for our generation an ideal edition of the *Urdu-i-Mualla* is still needed. The book should be as neatly and as correctly printed and lithographed as possible, for the letters of Ghalib are valuable not only as models of good Urdu

prose, but they are precious also as the best introduction to the personality of the author himself. It is obvious that they do not represent anything like the bulk of all the letters that he wrote to his friends. They must certainly be only a portion of all that he wrote in this form. The two parts of the *Urdu-i-Mualla* have been supplemented by a number of letters from the same pen, which have been collected in a book called the *Ud-i-Hindi*. I have before me the edition of this book published at the Nawal Kishore Press, Cawnpore. This collection was made by one Muhammad Mumtaz Ali Khan and the edition before me is the fourth one of its kind and was published about 1913. This is not as well got up as the *Urdu-i-Mualla* of the Mujtabai Press of Delhi, though the latter too could be improved upon.

I have not said anything above as to the historic value of these letters but it may safely be said that it is not inconsiderable. The information that we get in these letters about men and manners, as they existed in Delhi in the middle and the latter part of the 19th century, the graphic descriptions they give us of some of the events of the Mutiny and the incidents following it, are valuable as they are, but the value will grow more and more as time advances. In fact the letters appear to me to be worth being translated into English to place the information available in them within the reach of those who do not know Urdu.

I now proceed to give some extracts from the letters of Ghalib to illustrate the points

briefly alluded to above and to bring out the special characteristics of Ghalib as a writer and as a man.

In a letter to Tafta,<sup>1</sup> Ghalib tells us in what light he regards the writing of letters to friends and the receiving of letters from them. He says: "Well, sir, would you continue to be cross or would you make peace with me. If you cannot get reconciled to me you should at least tell me the reason why you are cross. In my solitude I live chiefly on letters from friends. When I get a letter from a friend I take it to be as a visit from him. There is not a day on which I do not receive several letters from various directions. In fact on some day the postman brings my letters more than once, a few in the morning and a few in the evening. This keeps me busy as well as amused and I easily pass my day in enjoying their perusal and in having the pleasure of writing replies to them." In another letter<sup>2</sup> to the same gentleman, Ghalib explains some of his literary ideals, especially with regard to his reluctance to indulge in exaggerations that were customary among Eastern writers. It appears from that letter that Tafta must have sent his book to Ghalib for comments (*Taqriz*). Eastern writers have had a practice of sending their books to their friends for writing eulogistic notes on them and it was understood that whether the friend to whom a book was submitted really thought highly of the composition or not, he must write a review highly praising the work which

---

1. Page 68, *Urdu-i-Mualla*.

2. Page 68, edition 1899, *Urdu-i-Mualla*.

would be published along with the book as a testimony of its excellence. People used, therefore, often to write much undeserved praise on books submitted to them and never thought that such an exaggeration would lower their own reputation as literary commentators in the eye of the public. The public too understood this and attached comparatively little value to such testimonials, a number of which we commonly find attached to every published book, independently of its merits. Ghalib tried to combat this wrong notion and endeavoured to be moderate in offering praise. It appears that he gave some mild praise to the book submitted to him by Tafta, who thereupon complained to him that he had not been treated kindly by him. It is in this connection that Ghalib writes: "I cannot give up my principles. I do not know that style of Indian writers of Persian in which they begin to praise one like professional Bhats.<sup>1</sup> Look at my *Qasidas*, you will find that the proportion of poetical flights on general subjects of a literary nature is much larger in them than the verses devoted to the eulogy of the person praised. The same principle I follow in my prose. Look at the *Tagriz* I wrote on the book of Nawab Mustafa Khan and see how small is the space devoted in it to his praise. See again the preface I wrote for the *Diwan* of Mirza Rahim-ud-Din Haya or look at the *Tagriz* I wrote

---

1. Bhats: A class of singers who committed to memory the genealogies of rich men and wove them into verses and on festive occasions came and recited those verses, giving at the same time highly coloured descriptions of the great deeds and exploits of the ancestors of the men praised by them. They did all this in the hope of getting a little money by way of reward.

at the instance of Mr. John Jacob on his edition of the *Diwan-i-Hafiz*. There is only one verse in praise of him and the rest of the writing, in prose, is on other interesting topics. I assure you if I had written a preface to a collection of poems of a prince I would not have given him more space than I have given to the praise of your work. If you knew this peculiarity of mine, you would have regarded the praise that I have bestowed on your work as enough". This was a much-needed reform and considering the time at which it was introduced, I think it was very brave of Ghalib to introduce it, in defiance of the popular fashion of the time and at the risk of offending the authors, most of whom were his personal friends.

I have mentioned in the essay on Ghalib as a poet, that there were numerous pupils of Ghalib who submitted their verses to him for criticism or improvement. A few words about this peculiar system in the East may not be out of place. It is as true of the East as of the West that a poet is born and not made, so far as the poet in the real sense of the term is concerned, but from very early times it has been customary in Persia and India for well-to-do men of culture and others to write verses and to assume poetical names and for this purpose to submit their verses to some well-known master of their time for correction. Except in the case of princes or noblemen, who used either to fix stipends for this work or make occasional presents to their teachers of poetry, the majority of such pupils paid nothing to the master, who corrected the verses of most of his



pupils in order to encourage literary taste and to enlarge the number of his pupils, which was often regarded as a matter of pride. This entailed a large sacrifice of time and energy on the part of some of our great writers, for which a parallel can scarcely be found in the lives of their Western compeers. Ghalib in his conscientious desire to help his pupils as much as possible, added much more to the ordinary heavy nature of this task by not only making corrections in the compositions submitted to him but by generally writing additional explanatory notes and directions in letters accompanying or following the corrected sheets. Some idea of this labour may be formed from a passage in his letter to Tafta: '1 "The verses of *Rind* were corrected within a week after their arrival and I made additional suggestions and useful notes thereon as I usually do."

To give just a sample of the kind of help that he used to render to the better class of his pupils, a portion of a letter to Tafta giving a detailed criticism of one of his *Qasidas* is given below: '2

"Well done. What a nice *Qasida* you have written. The continuity of sense and the simplicity of words are praise-worthy. One of your lines coincides with a line of a verse from *Shaukat* of Bukhara, that is *Chak gardidamo az jaib badaman raftam*. I think you may well be proud of your thought having reached the same height as that of *Shaukat* in this line, but the line preceding this in your poem does not come up to the corresponding line of *Shaukat*. I would

1. At page 64, *Urdu-i-Mualla*, edition of 1899.

2. At page 51, *Urdu-i-Mualla*.

have been so glad if you had equalled or excelled him in that line also. I wish God may grant you so much of life as to enable you to write a collection of *Qasidas* extending over some three hundred pages, but we are not to collect *Qasidas* according to the letters of the alphabet." This last advice is very significant. This clearly shows what a literary reformer Ghalib was. The old custom in this respect for poets was, if they were making a collection of *Ghazals*, to write *Ghazals* ending with every letter of the alphabet and to follow the same method in a collection of *Qasidas*. Ghalib realised that this must lead to artificiality. A man may find that he has nothing much to say which would give him a sufficient number of verses ending in a particular letter of the alphabet. The search for words ending in that letter and the effort to compose verses containing such words would lead him away from thoughts that might have elevated his *Qasidas* to a high level. Versification of this kind would be a mere form without any life or soul in it. Ghalib, therefore, warns his friend that he should not aim at writing according to the letters of the alphabet but should try to compress more sense and thought in what he writes and to sing according to the inspiration of the moment. It is further noteworthy that his desire to confine the ambition of a profuse writer like Tafta to 20 *Qasidas* only was a hint that quality rather than quantity should be his aim. He meant to say that 300 pages of good verse were much better than a larger number of indifferent quality.

Like a good artist and a refined scholar with

an established reputation he was very punctilious about the correct printing of his works. He did not allow, so far as he could help it, a single mistake to be made in the copying or the printing of any of his books. From a letter<sup>1</sup> to Tafta, dated the 16th September, 1858, it appears that in a book of his the word *Nahib* got printed by mistake instead of some other word. Ghalib detected this while the book was still in the press but when a large number of forms had been printed off. He wrote at once to Tafta, under whose supervision the book was being published, as follows:—"The two leaves in which the word *Nahib* occurs may be removed and corrected and other leaves substituted for them. It does not matter whether such leaves number 400 or 500. Please get them all changed and whatever expense is incurred for the papers so wasted, I will bear that. If this word stands as it is, the whole book will be disfigured and there will be a blot on my name. It is an Arabic word. I had corrected it in the manuscript. It seems to have escaped the eye of the litho-grapher. I am dying of the *Nahib* (fear) of this word *Nahib*, and would like to have soon the information that it has been corrected". He returns to the same topic in another letter<sup>2</sup> which need not be quoted; but which shows his anxiety in this behalf. It is painful to observe that in the publication of many of the works of such a writer, subsequent to his death, mistakes of printing have crept in, to a large extent.

---

1. At pages, 60-61 of *Urdu-i-Mualla*, edition of 1899.  
 2. Printed at page 86 of *Urdu-i-Mualla*.

Ghalib's good taste was not confined to a desire for excellence of quality in literature and for its correct publication, but he attached great value to the excellence of get-up also. There are numerous passages in his letters which show that he liked neatly and beautifully got up books and detested the absence of these features. Tafta once sent him two copies of a book of his called *Sunbalistan*, which was badly printed. Ghalib, instead of thanking him for the present, wrote frankly showing his dislike of the get-up of the book. He said: "You have wasted<sup>1</sup> your money and also your composition and my corrections. What a bad copy of your verses this is. You could have understood what relation your verses bear to this bad copy of them, if you had been here in these days and had seen some of the unfortunate Begams from the old Royal fort going about in the streets, whose faces are beautiful as the full moon, but whose clothes are dirty and shabby and whose shoes are torn. I am not exaggerating things when I use this simile, but in truth I regard the *Sunbalistan* as a beautiful sweet-heart in an ugly dress".

In another passage, in a letter addressed to Mir Mehdi *Majruh*, we find an expression of a liking for neat printing and a dislike for the reverse. Ghalib says: "Good printing is done at Lucknow. Whosoever gets his *Diwan* printed there is elevated to the skies by praise and the beauty of calligraphy adorns his words, but curse be on Delhi, its weather and its printing. Pub-

---

1. Letter dated 19th April, 1861, page 58 of *Urdu-i-Mualla*.

lishers here do not know how to mention the name of a writer properly. I have been carefully examining every copy as it was sent to me. The calligraphist used to send the copy to me, through another man and now that the *Diwan* has been published and a copy of it has been presented to me as its author, I find that the mistakes are all there and the copyist never took the trouble to correct them. So I have had to add a list of corrections and shall have to purchase some copies of the book for distribution, whether I like them or not. I will send you 3 copies for you and both of my other friends. I am not pleased with the book nor will you be". This very letter contains a curious passage to which attention may be drawn as a specimen of the way of thinking of those times and to show that Ghalib was too much of a poet to be a business man and that he considered it far from genteel to sell his own books. He writes: "You tell me that there are many people desirous of purchasing the book and that I should let you know the price. I am not a broker, a bookseller or the manager of a press. The owner of the Ahmadi Press, where it has been published, is Muhammad Hussain Khan. Its manager is Mirza Ammun Khan. The press is at Shahdara. The owner lives at Delhi in Kucha Rai Man. The price of the book is -/6/-, postage extra. You may give this information to intending purchasers, who may send for any number of copies they may like by post. They may remit the price either in cash or in postage stamps to the above address. You and I have nothing to do with the matter."

The above extracts, though not uninteresting from a biographical point of view, are mainly possessed of literary interest. The majority of the letters, however, have an auto-biographic value and would furnish material for an excellent biography.<sup>1</sup> If more letters had been forthcoming and if they had been arranged in their chronological order, they might have furnished material for a life of Ghalib, which could have compared favourably with Cross's life of George Elliot, which consists only of the letters of the eminent lady-novelist, properly arranged.

I will now give, by way of illustration, extracts from some of the letters in which the author tells the story of his own life. A letter to Saif-ul-Haq *Sayyah* thus describes one of the sources of income on which Ghalib depended, for a long period, for his maintenance: "For 12 years the late Nāwab Yusaf Ali Khan of Rampur used to send his verses to me and to send a draft for Rs. 100 every month, but never asked me for a receipt for this money. He used to enclose the draft in his letter and he used occasionally to send a lump sum of Rs. 200 or 250 as a present. During the disturbed period following the Mutiny my income from the fort (that is the Red Fort of Delhi) had vanished and the pension from the British Government had been stopped. It was through the kindness of the Nawab of Rampur, who continued sending the fixed salary every month and

---

1. A biography of Ghalib, based on his letters, coupled with other available material has been recently written and published by M. Ghulam Rasul, *Mihr*, Editor of the *Daily Inqilab* of Lahore.

2. Page 13 of *Urdu-i-Mualla*, edition of 1899.

other sums in addition, that I and my dependents managed to live in those days. The present Nawab, his successor, may God preserve him long, continues to send me my monthly salary as usual, though I do not know whether occasional gifts would continue or not."

In another letter<sup>1</sup> to the same friend, dated the 25th August, 1867, when he was nearing the end of his life, Ghalib tells a pathetic story of his growing disabilities and apologises for being unable to write to his friends as he used to do. He says: "I got both your letters but could not reply to them. Before now I used to write while lying in my bed. Now I cannot do that even. My hands tremble and eye-sight is weak. There is no scribe in my employ. I can only get letters written now by a friend or a visitor to whom I dictate them. You must take me to be one on the eve of departure from this world. How can the newspaper men realise what I am reduced to. The two local papers, *Akmalul Akhbar* and *Ashraf-ul-Akhbar* know something about my present condition, as their editors are on visiting terms with me, and I have asked them to publish a full statement about my difficulties and to request my correspondents not to expect from me either replies to letters or corrections of poems. They published this, but no one seems to have paid any heed to my request. Letters are still pouring in from all sides, followed by reminders for replies and verses are still sent to me to be corrected. I cannot cope with this work and I am put to

---

1. Page 16 of *Urdu-i-Mualla*, edition of 1899.

shame. Old and decrepit, totally deaf and half blind, I am lying in bed like a block day and night." This very letter contains an allusion to the request which he seems to have received, times out of number, to be photographed and to send his photo to his friends. He writes: "An Indian photographer who was a friend of mine has left this place. There is an Englishman who takes photographs but wherefrom can I find strength enough to get down from the upper storey of my house and to get into a palanquin to go to his studio, to sit and wait on a chair for an hour or two and to return home alive after such a tedious process." His kind nature seems, however, to have found the persistent demands of his friends too hard to resist as he was after all photographed in his old age.

At the end of the letter above cited, Ghalib expresses tender sympathy with his friend in the loss of a child sustained by the latter about that time. He says: "I have learnt with great sorrow that you have lost your recently born son. Ask me what it is to lose a child. During the 74 years of my life I had seven children, boys as well as girls, none of whom lived to be older than 15 months. You are still young and need not despair. May God grant you patience to bear this loss and favour you with a better substitute for the lost one." In another letter<sup>1</sup> to the same correspondent, bearing date 17th September, 1865, there is a reference to a book of the author called *Nama-i-Ghalib*, (in Persian), which shows

---

1. Page 21, *Urdu-i-Mualla*.



that notwithstanding his stinted means, Ghalib could spend considerable sums in the service of literature. He writes: "I got 300 copies of the book printed at my own expense and distributed them far and wide. I cannot send you a copy of it because parcels are not taken by the Post Office on Sundays. I shall send you to-morrow all the copies that are left with me."

Another 'letter to Saif-ul-Haq, dated the 17th June, 1866, might be produced to show Ghalib's fondness for fruit, particularly for mangoes. He used to get baskets full of them sent to him from various places. The frankness with which he accepted or rejected offers of such presents from friends is something refreshing to read about in these conventional days. He says: "I cannot think of anything which I can ask you to send me from Surat. What is there to be had which cannot be had here. I like mangoes, no doubt, very much, not less than grapes, but how can they reach here safely from Surat and Bombay. The *Malda* mangoes are known here as *Pewandi* and *Vilayati*. They are fine indeed and they would be finer still at Surat, but it seems you would be going out of the way to send them from there to Delhi. The expense of sending mangoes worth a rupee would amount to about Rs. 4 by the parcel post and even then perhaps 10 out of 100 will get here in a sound condition. Please give up the idea of sending me any. Delicious mangoes of various kinds can be had here in plenty. The Nawab of Rampur often sends pre-

sents of fine mangoes from his own garden. While I am writing I have just received two baskets of mangoes from a friend at Bareilly. They have been opened in my presence but all except 83 out of 200 sent to me have become rotten." A specimen of a witty suggestion that mangoes may be sent to him may also be mentioned. Once Ghalib was walking about with Bahadur Shah, the last Moghal Emperor, in a garden full of mangoe trees laden with very tempting fruit. He looked intently at the trees. The King asked what was he gazing at. He recited a Persian verse which says that there is no single fruit in the world which has not got on it the name and parentage of the person who is destined to enjoy it. Ghalib added that he was looking at the fruits to see if any of them bore his name on it. The King was very much amused at this humorous request and sent him a large quantity of different varieties of mangoes from the Royal garden. On another occasion Ghalib wrote a nice little poem on mangoes by way of thanks for mangoes sent to him. This poem is published in the Urdu *Diwan*.

Turning to another correspondent, M. Habib Ullah Khan, there is a letter addressed to him, dated the 15th February, 1867<sup>1</sup>, full of autobiographic interest. It reads thus:—"You want to know something about me and the *Khilat* which I am entitled to. As regards my nationality I am a Turk belonging to the Saljuk dynasty. My grand-father came to India in the time of Shah Alam. The Mughal Government was then on

---

1. Pages 28-29 of *Urdu-i-Mualla*.



Since then a *Khilat* of the same kind was always granted to me when there was a *Darbar* at Delhi. After the Mutiny my *Khilat* and my entry into the *Darbar* were both stopped on the ground that I was one of the associates of the late King Bahadur Shah. My application showing my innocence was then investigated and the trouble ended after 3 years and the usual *Khilat* was restored to me. This was a remnant of the estate which I had lost and not a reward for any service rendered by me." There is a passage in this very letter which repeats Ghalib's own description of his old age and may be quoted, as many of the details given in it were not mentioned in a similar extract already made from another letter. "In Urdu they speak of the age of 70 or 72 as an equivalent for dotage. I am now 73 years old and therefore more than a dotard. My memory now is as if it had never been. My hearing had become very dull long ago, but now the sense of hearing too has disappeared like my memory. For more than a month it has been usual for friends, who come to see me, to write down on paper whatever they have got to say after the usual salutations. My food is now next to nothing. In the morning I take a little of the water of pounded almonds mixed with sugar, at noon I take a little soup, in the evening 4 fried *kababs* and at bed time a little wine, about five rupees in weight, mixed with the same quantity of rose water. Thus you will see I am an absolutely useless old fogey dying under the burden of sins." References to personal anecdotes in these letters are numerous and space does not permit me to

give many more extracts under this heading. Persons interested in these anecdotes must read the book itself. I may, however, give one more passage dealing with an incident of Ghalib's life, which is illustrative of the liberality with which literary men used to be rewarded by some Oriental rulers and the niggardliness with which some greedy courtiers of such rulers used to treat literary men.<sup>1</sup> Writing to Tafta, Ghalib refers to one of his *Qasidas* which fetched him a reward of Rs. 5,000, which he unfortunately never received. He writes: "You have reminded me of a very old story, which has revived a sore spot in my heart. A *Qasida* was submitted through Munshi Muhammad Husain to Roshan-ud-Daula and through the latter to Nawab Naseer-ud-Din Haider of Lucknow. The Nawab ordered Rs.5,000 to be sent to me on the very day when the *Qasida* reached him. Muhammad Husain, the middle-man, never informed me of this order. The late Muzaffar-ud-Daula came to Delhi from Lucknow sometime after this and told me about it, but he asked me not to tell Muhammad Husain that he had given me this information. I wrote to Shaikh Imam Bakhsh *Nasikh* to enquire what had been the fate of my *Qasida*. He wrote back in reply that a reward of Rs. 5,000 had been given by the ruler of Lucknow, but Roshan-ud-Daula himself kept Rs. 3,000 out of the sum and gave Rs. 2,000 to Muhammad Husain, telling him to send Ghalib any sum that he liked out of Rs. 2,000. *Nasikh* enquired from me whether Muhammad Husain

---

<sup>1</sup> Page 51, *Urdu-i-Mualla*.

had sent anything out of the sum to me. I replied that I had not received even five rupees out of the whole sum of Rs. 5,000. *Nasikh* on hearing this wrote to me again that I should write to him a letter stating that I did not know whether any reward for my *Qasida* had been given by the King and he promised that he would manage to place the letter before the King and to get the person who had taken my money to disgorge it. I wrote a letter to the above effect as desired and posted it; but on the 3rd day after the despatch of the letter I heard a report in Delhi that Naseer-ud-Din Haidar was dead. You can see for yourself what could I do and what could be done by *Nasikh* after this misfortune." It is tragic indeed and typical of the disappointments which many a literary man in the East, who used to depend on the patronage of the royalty and nobility, had to face. The day had not dawned yet when good literary work could find a market for itself in the country and when special patronage was to be replaced by the general patronage of the public. Things have improved considerably in this country since the days of Ghalib and there have been many among recent writers of Urdu, who have derived fairly good incomes from the publication of their writings; though their earnings can hardly come up even now to the level of those of the best modern writers in Western countries.

There is another passage which is too tempting to be left out. It possesses a peculiar interest for the Punjab University. There is a reference in Ghalib's letters to a Treasury Officer named Mr. Rattigan, who is described as engaged in

writing a *Tazkira* of Urdu poets in English. I believe the gentleman alluded to is no other than the person who was afterwards called to the bar and became famous in this Province and throughout India as Sir William Rattigan and who for a long time guided the destinies of this University as its Vice-Chancellor. Ghalib writes: "I met Rattigan Sahib. He is writing in English<sup>1</sup> a *Tazkira* of Indian poets and he asked me to help him. I have sent to him seven books which I borrowed from Zia-ud-Din Khan. Then he asked me to write for him an account of some living poets whom I know well personally. I have written for him an account of 16 living writers among whom may be mentioned Nawab Zia-ud-Din Ahmad Khan of Loharu, who writes good verses both in Persian and Urdu and styles himself as *Nayyar* in Persian and *Rakhshan* in Urdu; Nawab Mustafa Khan, who has the *nom de plume* of *Shefta* in Urdu and *Hasrati* in Persian, and Munshi Hargopal Tafta. No translation of the Hindi or Persian verses will be included in the proposed compilation, but only the name of the poet and of his literary master and the poet's address and residence and his *nom de plume*. Mr. Rattigan has now become the Judge of the Small Cause Court." In another letter Ghalib refers to Mr. Rattigan as having been transferred to the Punjab on the 19th January, 1865. I do not know whether the *Tazkira* spoken of as under compilation ever came out or not, but it is interesting to note that the versatile genius of Sir

<sup>1</sup> Page 83, *Urdu-i-Mualla*.

William Rattigan had not left the Urdu language and literature out of its sphere of activity.

I hope the translations of some of the extracts of Ghalib's Urdu prose that I have given from his letters, collected in the *Urdu-i-Mualla*,<sup>1</sup> will induce those who have not read the book before, to study it. They will find it interesting as descriptive of Ghalib's personal experiences and useful as a model of elegant and simple prose.

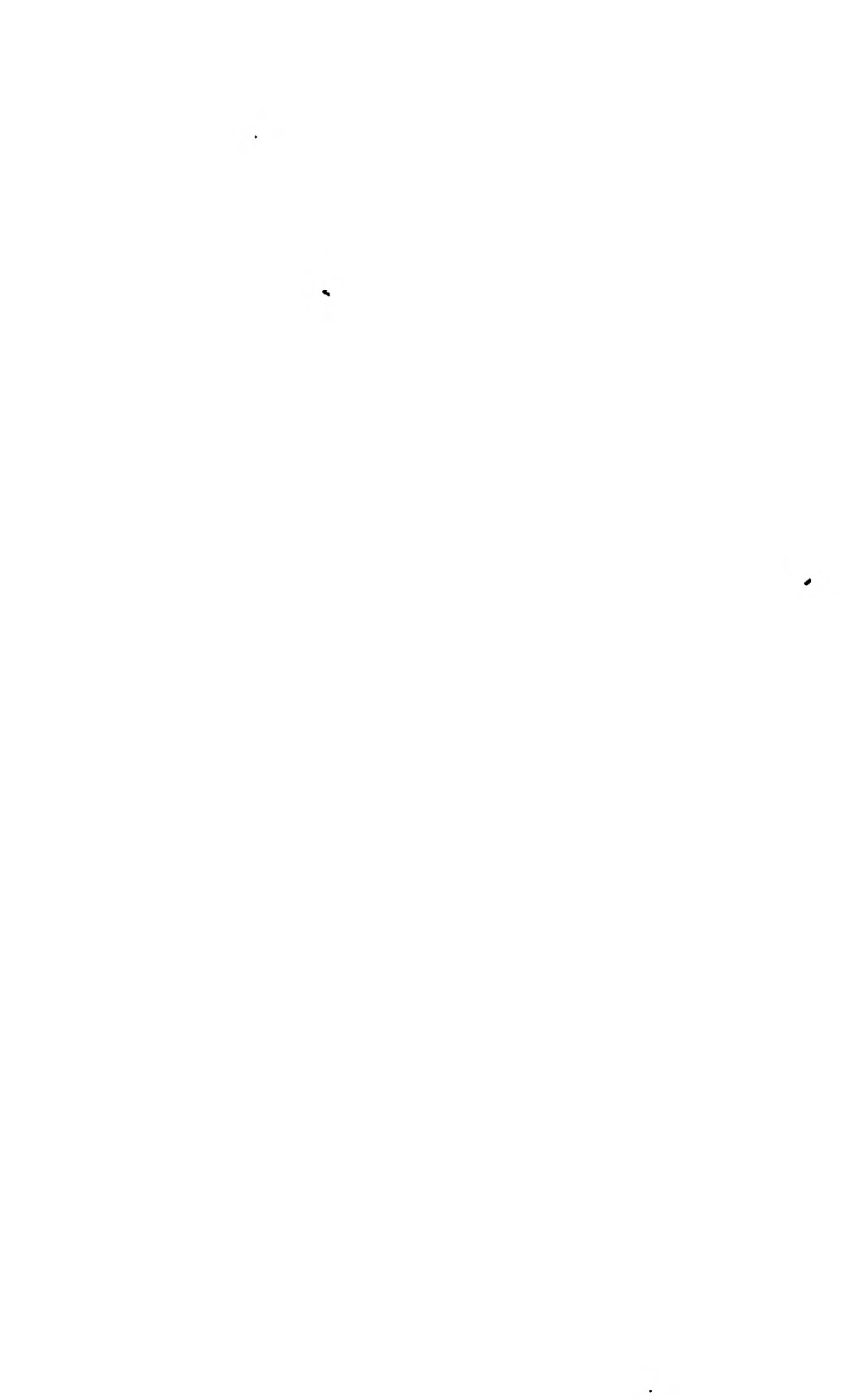
Ghalib's letters show that before he died, a fairly large number of English words had been introduced into the Urdu language, some without any change and some with slight modifications. Ghalib used those words but with the exception of this one indication of the influence of the West on Urdu, Ghalib's writings do not show any traces of contact with the West. His thoughts, both in poetry and prose, are essentially Eastern and are dressed in a purely Oriental garb. It is not till the writings of Syed Ahmad Khan and his co-workers like *Hali* and Nazir Ahmad came into existence that we see a distinct impress on Urdu of its contact with the English language and literature. This impress is gaining in depth and strength every day, in spite of a reaction which is noticeable against the dominating influence of Western culture. Ghalib, however, lived at a time when purely Oriental culture retained all its best features and had not yielded to Western influences and may be regarded as the fittest repre-

---

1. A better collection, which is in beautiful typed letters, has been recently published in 1941, by Munshi Mahesh Parshad and revised by Dr. Abdus Sattar Siddiqi of Allahabad. It is called *Khutut-i-Ghalib*.



sentative of the old school of writers. A man of letters in the fullest sense of the word, he lived for literature and died serving its cause up to the very last days of his life. He died on the 15th February, 1869, and is resting near the sacred shrine of *Sultan-ul-Aulia* Nizam-ud-Din of Delhi, sharing that privilege with no less a personage than the famous poet, Amir Khusro.





Sir Syed Ahmad Khan

## Sir Syed Ahmad Khan.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century Sir Syed Ahmed Khan of Delhi wielded such a vast influence on India in general and Muslim India in particular, as a great educationist and a reformer, that one is apt to lose sight of the fact that he was a great literary man first and everything else afterwards. From one point of view modern Urdu literature owes more to him than to any one man of his generation. His own work, as an eminent writer of Urdu prose, is important, both as regards its quality and quantity, and therefore his direct service to Urdu literature is as valuable as that of any of his contemporaries; but what further entitles him to our gratitude is the service he has indirectly rendered, by collecting round him a galaxy of brilliant scholars, who shone as writers of good Urdu prose and poetry, under his sympathetic and inspiring guidance. He was, as it were, a maker of literary men and responsible for the creation of a new school of Urdu literature.

He tried to improve the tone of Urdu literature and his efforts met with considerable success. As one born and bred in Delhi, he spoke the purest language of Delhi homes. When he began to write he tried to write a simple and unartificial style, which appeals immensely to a reader by its

directness and effect. He completed the work which Ghalib had started by introducing a simple and natural style in Urdu prose and giving up the ornate and stilted manner of writing, which prevailed before.

It is not necessary to give here at great length the story of his interesting and useful life. Two excellent biographies of Sir Syed have been written, one in English, by Col. Graham, and the other in Urdu by Maulana Hali. Hali has aptly called his book *Hayat-i-Jawid*, or "Life Everlasting," meaning to say that people who live the life that Syed Ahmad Khan lived, earn immortality and leave behind an undying name. The book is a fitting tribute to the memory of the deceased Syed, paid by one of his sincerest admirers and friends, who had numerous opportunities of personal contact with him. Any one desiring to have full information about the life of Sir Syed should read the *Hayat-i-Jawid*.

It is sufficient for the purposes of this sketch, to state briefly that Syed Ahmad Khan was born at Delhi on the 17th October 1817, in a family known for its learning. His mother's father, Khwaja Farid-ud-Din Ahmad, was a remarkable man. He was known as a great mathematician and, after a varied career, was appointed as a Minister by Akbar Shah II in 1815. He tried for some time to improve the finances of the tottering kingdom of the Moghals, but the retrenchments effected by him made him unpopular and he had to retire from the position. Syed Ahmed Khan's mother was the eldest daughter of Khwaja Farid-ud-Din. On the father's side Syed Ahmad

Khan belonged to a Syed family that had long been settled at Hirat, from where his ancestors moved to India, probably in the time of the Emperor Shah Jahan. His grandfather, Syed Hadi, was a high officer in the time of Alamgir II. Syed Ahmad Khan's father, Mir Muttaqi, did not accept office in the Moghal court but had always easy access to it. He was famous as an expert archer and swimmer, and as in those days both these accomplishments were highly prized by the nobility and gentry of Delhi, he had many pupils who learnt marksmanship and swimming from him. Syed Ahmad Khan also learnt the same from his father. The early education of Syed Ahmad Khan was not very regular and complete, even according to the standard of education prevailing at the time, but it was fairly extensive. He began reading the Quran with a lady teacher, then read some elementary books of Persian with a teacher named Maulvi Hamid-ud-Din and then studied Arabic for some time. He studied mathematics with a maternal uncle of his, who had inherited a taste for it from Khwaja Farid-ud-Din. He also studied astronomy for a short time. He studied Yunani medicine with Hakim Ghulam Haidar Khan, a well-known physician of his day. His career as a student, however, ended when he was eighteen or nineteen, though upto the end of his life he continued to be a student, adding to his stock of knowledge by self-study. In his youth he came in contact with some of the famous poets of Delhi like Ghalib, Azurda and Sahbai and often joined their literary circles. The grounding he thus got in various branches of learning stood him

in good stead in after life.

In 1838 he entered Government service as a reader in the Court of the Sadr Amin at Delhi. He went to Agra in 1839 as Naib Munshi to the Commissioner, and rose to the position of a Munsiff in 1841. After serving as a Munsiff at various places, he was transferred to Delhi in the same capacity in 1846. There he saw an opportunity of reviving his studies formally under able teachers and acquired a fairly advanced knowledge of Arabic, thus equipping himself for his work as a commentator on the Quran and as a defender of Islam against attacks from hostile critics.

He did not take long to discover that he had been endowed by nature with a gift for writing and speaking. He was further favoured by Providence with a robust and enduring constitution and had a wonderful capacity for hard work. His first book that was published in 1840, when he was only a youth of three and twenty, working in a humble position in the Commissioner's Office, was a tabular statement in Persian, called the *Jam-i-Jam*, in which he gave an account of various royal dynasties from Timarlane down to Bahadur Shah, the last of the Moghals. This showed his acquaintance with history and ability to do research work. His next work was of a different kind. It was an abstract of Civil Laws for the use of Munsiffs. This book was in Urdu and was appreciated by Government, and on the strength of that, he was accepted as a candidate for Munsiffship. His early religious training then asserted itself and he published a pamphlet called *Jila-ul-qulub*, giving an account of the birth and death of the Prophet.

His versatility further showed itself in another direction by the publication in 1844 of an Urdu translation of a small book on mechanics. While at Delhi he also laid the foundation of his future work as a journalist, by frequently contributing to the *Syed-ul-Akhbar*, a paper which had been started at Delhi by his elder brother. The first work, however, of real value, from his pen, was the *Asar-us-Sanadid*, which gave an account of old Delhi and of the monuments of ancient times, with which the capital and its environments were studded. He had devoted all his leisure hours for a considerable period to the collection of material for this historical work and it was illustrated by plans and sketches of old buildings and by facsimilies of the inscriptions that were to be found on them. The spirit of devotion to this work, which characterised him at the time, may be judged by the fact that in order to decipher the more lofty of the inscriptions on the Qutab Minar, Syed Ahmad Khan used to get into a basket tied to two poles and placed in front of the part of which the inscription was to be deciphered. He himself describes the process which was adopted and the fear that the risky experiment used to excite in the mind of his friend Sahbai. He says:—

قطب صاحب کی لائے بعض کتبے جو زیادہ بلند ہونے کے سبب پڑھے نہ جاسکتے تھے۔ انکے پڑھنے کو ایک چھینکا دو بلوں کے بیچ میں ہر ایک کتبے کے متحاذی بندھوا لیا جاتا تھا اور میں خود اوپر چڑھکر اور چھینکے میں بیٹھکر ہر کتبے کا چربا اتارتا تھا۔ جس وقت میں چھینکے میں بیٹھتا تھا تو مولانا صہبائی فرط محبت کے سبب گھبراتے تھے اور خوف کے مارے ان کا رنگ متغیر ہو جاتا تھا۔



This book came out in 1847, and at once brought the author into prominence. Mr. Roberts, a European friend of the author, took a copy of the book to England and brought it to the notice of the Royal Asiatic Society, London, which expressed its appreciation of the book and desired that it might be translated into English. Syed Ahmad Khan brought out a revised edition of the book in 1854, with the addition of new and better plans and sketches, but most of the copies of the second edition along with the plans were lost during the Mutiny. Some of the plans subsequently recovered have been preserved in the Library of the M. A. O. College at Aligarh.<sup>1</sup> The second edition was not only an improvement on the first one, in outward appearance, but also in its reading matter. This book, however, was written in a cumbrous old-fashioned style and in that respect cannot bear comparison with the clear and lucid style of Urdu prose, which characterised most of the subsequent writings of the same author.

Before passing on to other literary productions of Syed Ahmad Khan, it may be mentioned that the famous French Orientalist, M. Garcon de Tassy paid the *Asar-us-Sanadid* the compliment of translating it into French, which translation was published in 1861. A copy of the translation was sent to the author. When the Royal Asiatic Society of London saw this translation they elected Syed Ahmed Khan an Honorary Fellow of the Society in 1864. Later on, when the Edinburgh University conferred on Syed Ahmad Khan the

---

1. It has since developed into the Muslim University.

honorary degree of LL. D. in 1889, in his absence, this book was particularly mentioned along with the *Khutabat-i-Ahmadya* as entitling him to that distinction.

Having spent 8 years at Delhi as a Munsiff, Syed Ahmad Khan was promoted to the position of a Sadr Amin at Bijnore. While there, he compiled a history of Bijnore. He also edited and corrected the *Ain-i-Akbari* of Abul Fazal for publication. This edition was to be in three volumes and the editor had added an introduction containing a detailed review of the book. The first and the third volumes were printed and the second volume with a number of illustrations and sketches was ready to go to the Press, when the Mutiny broke out and this valuable material was lost.

From Bijnore Syed Ahmad Khan was transferred to Moradabad as *Sadr-us-Sadur* in 1858. Soon after that he brought out his book called *Tarikh-i-Sarkashi-i-Bijnore*, giving an account of the rebellion in that town. This was a work of local interest, but another little book, of Syed Ahmad Khan dealing with the Mutiny and published in 1859, was much more valuable and of general interest. This was known as *Asbab-i-Baghawat-i-Hind*, or "the Causes of the Indian Revolt." Small as the book is, it is very striking indeed. It required more than ordinary courage to write so boldly and frankly as Syed Ahmad Khan did, in the perilous days immediately succeeding the Mutiny, and he did so at considerable personal risk. He got 500 copies of the book printed, but he did not publish them in India, lest such publication may cause excitement or be mis-

understood. He kept one copy of the book with himself, sent another copy to the Government of India and all the rest he sent in a parcel to England, for distribution there among those interested in the matter. In the Council of the Viceroy the book was discussed, when Lord Canning and Sir Bartle Frere expressed their opinion in its favour as a book written with a desire to help the Government, while Mr. Cecil Beadon spoke strongly against it as a seditious work. An English translation of the book appeared in 1873 from the pen of Col. Graham. Barring the two copies alluded to above, there is no copy of the original book in India, but Maulana Hali has reproduced it or perhaps the greater part of it, as an appendix to the *Hayat-i-Jawid*, and Malak Fazl-ud-Din, Book-seller of Lahore, has since published a reprint of it.

This book has not only a historic interest for us, but is important from other points of view as well. Its style, though simple and impressive, lacks much of the elegance of the style later on developed by the author and by his contemporaries who collected round him. It presents here and there specimens of the old method of Urdu writing, imitating more or less the style of literal translations from Arabic. We read for instance:—

واسطے اسلوبی اور خوبی اور پائیداری گورنمنٹ کے مداخلت  
روایا کی حکومت ملک میں واجبات سے ہے۔

or

بادشاہان ملک غیر بیوی کمال اعتبار رکھتے تھے ہماری  
گورنمنٹ پر۔

or

مثلاً نابود کر دینے علم عربی و سنسکرت کے اور مفلس و  
محتاج کر دینے ملک کے۔

Such passages are, however, few and far between and the rest of the book is written in an easy flowing style, which it is a pleasure to read.

There is another feature of the book which is fascinating and that is the perfect candour, with which the author has expressed his opinions, some of which are as applicable to present day life as they were in 1859.

Syed Ahmad Khan edited and corrected the *Tarikh-i-Ferozshahi* for the Asiatic Society, Bengal, and this edition was published by the Society, in 1862.

He next directed his attention to a commentary of the Bible in Urdu, with some introductory chapters. He wrote a considerable part of this commentary, but this work remained incomplete. To this work M. Garcon de Tassy made a very appreciative reference in 1883.

Syed Ahmad Khan experienced a sad bereavement by the death of his wife in 1861. She died leaving three children. Two of them were boys, of whom Syed Mahmud, afterwards Mr. Justice Mahmud, was one. The Syed was asked by several friends to seek comfort in a second marriage, but he decided to pass the remainder of his life singly, as one wedded to the service of his fellow men and devoted to the spreading of learning among his co-religionists.

The works that have been noticed already were only an earnest of what was to follow and his main activity in the field of letters was really

to commence after this sad loss, when the cause of education and enlightenment grew from a favourite hobby to an absorbing passion in the mind of Syed Ahmad Khan.

As one who improved Urdu prose and shaped it into a vehicle of serious thought and speech, the name of Syed Ahmed Khan will always be remembered. His practical temperament was admirably suited for the performance of this role. It is remarkable that a man, who had passed his youth in the gay society of Delhi, who had associated with a poet like Ghalib, and who had been present at many a poetical contest, remained free from any real inclination towards writing poetry. He would occasionally read poetry and appreciate a good verse when he heard it, but he regarded life as too serious to be spent in weaving beautiful fabrics of mere words. His strong commonsense revolted against making poetry his main vocation. The prose in life appealed to him as much as poetry did to others. He may have possibly indulged in early youth in writing verses, but he suppressed his inclination in this direction so successfully in later life that you hardly find any traces of it. In fact you do not find him even quoting poetry very much in his speeches and writings.

Among the writers who came directly in touch with him, and whose tastes were formed in his elevating company, may be mentioned Maulvi Hali, Maulvi Nazeer Ahmed, Maulvi Shibli, Maulvi Zakaullah and Syed Mehdi Ali, better known as Nawab Muhsinul Mulk, to give only a few of the most prominent men of letters. There is a host of others, too numerous to be mentioned, whose

writings have been influenced by the works of Sir Syed or by the School of literature brought into existence by him.

Of the great authors above named, Hali is the only one who is famous for his poetry as well as prose. His poetry breathes throughout the spirit of reform, which characterised the prose writings of Syed Ahmad Khan, and one scarcely doubts that many ideas embodied in the poems of Hali are inspired by Syed Ahmed Khan directly or indirectly. The "*Maddo Jazri Islam*" or "The Tide and Ebb of Islam" is the best known of Hali's poems and the idea of it was suggested by Syed Ahmad Khan.

This is only one illustration of the way in which the literary men of his day were, consciously or unconsciously, influenced by the great Syed. Such instances can be multiplied, but we have to resume the narrative of Syed Ahmad Khan's own literary activities.

Before noticing some of his work, it appears to be necessary to draw attention to the fact that Syed Ahmad Khan, while wielding a powerful influence on his contemporaries, was himself influenced, to a considerable extent, by Western culture, particularly English. It is rather strange, considering that he practically did not know English. He had only picked up a little knowledge of English at an advanced age, but he knew how to collect material for his writings from Western sources. He not only uses many English words in his writings, but has actually introduced many English ideas in Urdu and has imported many English turns of expression, which have now become

quite absorbed in the language. He has opened the door, as it were, for writers who came after him, to further enrich the language by introducing expressions and ideas from foreign sources, whenever they accord with the genius of Urdu. He represents the happy result of a blending of the thought of the East with the thought of the West. His bringing up and early training were those of a true Oriental, but with wonderful adaptability he made his own all that struck him as good and great in Western culture and civilisation. With a breadth of mind, which many who have received a much more liberal education might well emulate, he felt instinctively drawn towards the knowledge that could be gained from the West. He got many useful works from English translated into Urdu, thus adding to the stock of informative books in the language of the country.

In 1866 Syed Ahmad Khan started the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, which lasted till the end of his life and for which he worked as an honorary editor. This paper was, at one time, not only the accredited organ of the Muslims of Northern India, faithfully expressing their opinions on various topics of the day, but it also rendered valuable service to Urdu literature. The contributions of Syed Ahmad Khan to the paper, if collected, would make several volumes and would contain a good deal which would possess more than passing interest. The praise which Hali has bestowed upon this journal, appears to be well-deserved, so far as the earlier years of the life of the journal are concerned. The passage in the *Hayat-i-Jawid* in which Hali praised the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, is re-

produced below in translation, as it embodies the views of Hali on what a properly conducted journal should aim at. He says:—

“A distinguishing feature of this journal was that unlike many of its contemporaries it never injured the feelings of any sect or community. It never gave up sobriety of tone and never indulged in flippancy and unbecoming jokes to attract more customers. It did not write anything which would disturb friendly relations between one community and another in India. It did not write against any Hindu or Muslim State. It did not take part in religious disputes between Hindus and Muslims, and, if it ever intervened, it did so for purposes of bringing about reconciliation among them.”

Syed Ahmad Khan paid a visit to England in 1869 and remained there for a year. His energies found vent in many useful directions. What chiefly concerns us in this essay is the publication of an English translation of the *Khutabat-i-Ahmadya*. The book deals with the life and work of the Prophet of Islam and defends him against the attacks of Western critics. He had taken with him his notes in Urdu and he got a translation of them printed in England. On his return to India, an Urdu edition of the *Khutabat* was brought out, with some amplifications, by the author. He wrote graphic accounts of his travels, which appeared in the organ of his society at Aligarh, and would make an interesting book of travels.

It was in 1870, on his return from England, that Syed Ahmad Khan started his well-known



periodical, called the *Tehzib-ul-Akhlaq*, which made quite a stir in social, religious and literary circles during its existence. It ceased to exist in 1876, but has left a lasting mark on Muslim Society and Urdu literature. Many of the articles that were contributed to this periodical by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan are of permanent value and have been published in book form in Volume II of the abstracts from the *Tehzib-ul-Akhlaq*, published by Malak Fazl-ud-Din of Lahore. The volume is worth reading. Some portions of it may now be uninteresting, as dealing with matters which are no longer of any great moment, or on which public opinion has now undergone considerable change. Others may not appeal to some as purely religious or technical. But even after omitting such portions, there remains a good deal which can be read with advantage. In many of the articles of the *Tehzib* you see Syed Ahmad Khan at his best as a writer of Urdu. For example, I may cite the following passage in which Syed Ahmad Khan writes on the pleasures of hope:—

”او نورانی چہرے والی یقین کی اکلوتی بیٹی - امید - یہ  
خدا کی روشنی تیرے ساتھ ہے - تو ہی ہماری مصیبت کے  
وقتوں میں ہم کو تسلی دیتی ہے - تو ہی ہمارے آڑے وقتوں  
میں ہماری مدد کرتی ہے - تیری ہی بدولت دور دراز خوشیاں  
ہمیں پاس نظر آتی ہیں - ..... تیری ہی برکت سے خوشی  
خوشی کے لئے نام آوری - نام آوری کے لئے بہادری - بہادری  
کے لئے فیاضی - فیاضی کے لئے محبت - محبت کے لئے نیکی  
تیار ہے۔“

It is gratifying to notice that the lectures and speeches made by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan have

also been collected and offered to the public in the form of a book. We owe this collection to Maulvi Imam-ud-Din of Gujrat and its publication to the enterprise of Malak Fazl-ud-Din again. These speeches are full of thought and suggestions and some of them could be as useful to-day as they were when they were made years ago. For instance the learned and thoughtful lecture which was delivered at Mirzapur in 1873, has the following passage:

”یہ خیال کہ ہماری رسموں میں تبدیل کی ضرورت نہیں ہے (گو وہ کیسے ہی مضبوط یقین دل میں بیٹھا ہو۔ بیہوشی اور اعتماد کے لائق نہیں ہے۔ کیونکہ ممکن ہے کہ صرف عادت نے یہ خیال ہمارے دل میں جمایا ہو“

There is one more work of Sir Syed which may be noticed in conclusion. He started writing a commentary in Urdu on the Quran, which has been left unfinished, but the part that was written has been published. It was published by him in his life-time and a reprint of it in six volumes has been published by Malak Fazl-ud-Din. This work belongs to the domain of religion and does not require a detailed reference while we are dealing mainly with Sir Syed's services to literature. About the merits of the commentary there has been a great controversy. The orthodox Muslims have always looked upon it as a heretical interpretation of the Sacred Book, while many of those who have received modern education have given an unstinted meed of praise to this well-meant effort of the Syed, the real aim of which was to stem the tide of materialism and unbelief, which was coming in the wake of modern education and

which threatened to deprive many Mussalmans of their belief in their religion. In this object he succeeded to a considerable extent ; and even if it appears that, in his desire to reconcile religion with science, he occasionally resorted to far fetched arguments or fell into some errors of reasoning, there can be no doubt that posterity will give him credit for standing up boldly for freedom of opinion and thought and for devoting himself, according to the best of his ability, to the interpretation of the Holy Book.

Many small pamphlets and stray writings of Sir Syed have not been specifically mentioned in this essay, for want of space, but those who desire more exhaustive information about the literary works of the author, will find in the *Hayat-i-Jawid* a good book of reference. From what has been said above, it is clear that though service to literature was only one of the many fields of activity to which Sir Syed devoted his life, yet this alone, apart from his other great services, is enough to give him a lasting claim to our gratitude.

He lived a noble life and died a noble death. He used to spend every penny he had in the cause he had at heart, so that when he died there was nothing in his house to defray the expenses of his funeral, which were borne by a devoted friend.

His death evoked universal sorrow and mourning in the country and particularly among the Muslims and numerous elegies were written on his death. Thousands of meetings expressing regret at this national loss were held throughout

the country. Though a quarter<sup>1</sup> of a century has elapsed since his death, he lives still in the loving memory of thousands of admirers. His mortal remains have found repose in a corner of the spacious mosque he had built in the vast enclosure of the M. A. O. College at Aligarh. There rests one whose heart burnt all his life with the fire of patriotism and the desire to serve his co-religionists and his countrymen. A simple and unassuming grave marks his resting place, but it speaks eloquently, with its silent tongue, to those who were opposed to him during his life and used to avoid him as unorthodox, to come to his grave, to ponder over his work and to judge him better. It says, in the words of a Persian poet :

زمن بہ جرم طپیدن کنارہ می کردی  
بیا بہ خاک من و آر میدنم بنگر

“You were avoiding me during my life on account of my restlessness. Come now to my grave and see my repose.”

---

1. This was the approximate period that elapsed between the death of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and the time when this lecture was delivered.

## Dagh Dehlavi

Dagh is essentially a poet of the old school of poetry of Delhi, though his work belongs to the latter half of the nineteenth century. He and his distinguished contemporary, Amir, who was a worthy representative of the Lucknow School, preserved carefully the traditions of the ancient masters of *ghazal* and did not allow the purity of their language to be affected in the least by Western influences, which commenced in the period in which they lived. They wrote and sang in the same strain as they would have done, if India had been under purely Oriental rule. They practically declined to take any notice of the innovations that were springing up in the country with the advance of Western education. You do not find them making a free use of words which Urdu is borrowing from the English language. You do not see them employing the various turns of expression fashioned after English idioms, which are now being so frequently used in Urdu, even by writers of acknowledged repute, both in prose and poetry. In their style as well as in their mode of thought, they adhered to the same principles which they had adopted with regard to their language. Heredity and early training may have had something to do with the tenacity, with which they clung to their old-



Dagh Dehlavi



world methods in an age dominated by new influences, but one circumstance particularly helped them in this respect. The greater part of their lives was spent at Rampur, in Rampur State, in the midst of surroundings which were peculiarly favourable to the preservation of their old notions, where they were, for a long time, away from contact with Western education or scholarship. Dagh went from Rampur to Hyderabad (Deccan), where again he had the advantage of breathing in an Oriental atmosphere. About the end of his career he must have come across a large number of men in Hyderabad who had received modern education and adopted Western ways of life, but he was then too old to change and he lived and died as a fit successor of Mir and Zauq.

Nawab Mirza Khan, better known by his *nom de plume*, Dagh, was the son of Nawab Shams-ud-Din and a grandson of Nawab Ahmad Bakhsh Khan, a family distinguished for its military as well as literary traditions. His education was on the same lines. Nawab Mirza read his Persian with Maulvi Ghias-ud-Din, the compiler of the popular Dictionary, called the *Ghias-ul-Lughat*. He learnt caligraphy from two of the best calligraphists of his time, Syed Amir Panjakash and Mirza Ibadullah Beg. He took a course of training in fencing, in horsemanship and marksmanship and became in early life an accomplished youth according to the standard obtaining in those days. The art of writing verse was also regarded as a necessary accomplishment for the nobility and he became a pupil of the



famous poet Zauq of Delhi, who counted the heir-apparent of the then King of Delhi among his pupils. This gave Dagh not only the advantage of the guidance of an undoubted master of Urdu verse, but also brought him into contact with the heir-apparent, who had a great talent for poetry and was devoting himself to it. Dagh found admission, while still a lad, to the poetical contests that used to be held inside the palace and were attended by the best poets of the day. In one of those contests, at which the King himself was present, he read a verse which so pleased the King that he kissed his forehead. It was soon discovered that in this young man they had a poet, who had received poetry as a gift from nature and was not resorting to versification simply as an art or an accomplishment. Though Zauq's fame was at its height, and Ghalib, who was at first known as a writer of Persian poetry, had also made a great mark as an Urdu poet, it is remarkable that about 1857 Dagh too was a poet who counted, though he was only six and twenty at the time.

The tale of the Mutiny and the wreck and ruin that it brought in its train are too well-known to require any repetition. Many a scholarly man in Delhi was obliged to leave his house and home and to migrate to other parts of India. Unfortunate as this was for Delhi, it was perhaps the means of spreading the light of old Delhi throughout the land. Many poets wrote elegies on Delhi as ruined by the Mutiny and the following lines of Dagh, from a *Musaddas* of his, on the subject will show what his feelings must have been.

زمین کے حال پہ اب آسمان روتا ہے  
 ہر اک فراق مکیں میں مکان روتا ہے  
 گداؤ شہ و ضعیف و جوان روتا ہے  
 غرض یہاں کیلئے اک جہان روتا ہے

“ Heaven now weeps over the condition, to which the earth has been reduced.

“ Every house weeps (in lonely solitude) for its denizens, who have departed.

“ (The misery is so universal) that the mendicant and the King, the old and the young, all weep alike.

“ A world, in short, is weeping over the ruin of Delhi ”)

It may be mentioned in this connection that the heart of the poet, though naturally mourning the misfortunes of his beloved town, was not without a prophetic gleam of hope, as unlike many others, he ended his poem with a prayer :

الہی پھر اسے آباد و شاد دیکھیں ہم  
 الہی پھر اسے حسب مراد دیکھیں ہم

“ May we see it prosperous and happy once more ;  
 “ May we see it as we desire. ”)

Though Dagh lived to catch occasional glimpses of the re-inhabited Delhi; that was not enough to satisfy one who had seen better days in the metropolis of India, and he died in a distant part of the country, which was his last adopted home and where he reached the height of his success.

Before we come, however, to the story of his life in the Deccan, we have to say something about the best part of his life spent at Rampur. The

rulers of this hospitable State have been known for their literary taste and their patronage of literature. Dagh found an asylum at Rampur, after the revolution at Delhi, in the time of Nawab Yusuf Ali Khan and continued to reside there happily till the time of Nawab Kalb-i-Ali Khan, who succeeded Nawab Yusuf Ali Khan. He was appointed a Superintendent of the State stables,<sup>1</sup> which sounds extremely unpoetic, but the Nawab thereby found a way to provide a decent living for a self-respecting man. It may also be remembered that Dagh's old love for horses and his horsemanship would fit him for this work, and yet the duties of his office would not be so heavy as to leave him no leisure for his favourite literary occupation. It is said he performed his duties to the satisfaction of everybody and held this position as long as he was there.<sup>2</sup> He enjoyed also the position of a companion of the ruler of the State. The Nawab liked his company very much on account of his literary talent.

At Rampur poetical contests were not uncommon, as the Nawab had quite a galaxy of *ghazal* writers around him, among whom Taslim and Amir may be specially mentioned. The latter was a formidable rival to Dagh as a poet. There has been a great controversy between the partisans of the Delhi School and the Lucknow School over the relative merits of Dagh and Amir, into which we need not enter, as most people are now inclined to acknowledge both of them as

1. Dagh-i-Dehlawi by S. Muhammad Faruq, Part 6.

2. Dagh-i-Dehlawi by S. Muhammad Faruq, Part 7.

masters of Urdu *ghazal* in modern times, each having his own distinguishing features. This view would find support from the attitude, which both these masters maintained towards one another. Unlike many others who shut their eyes to the merits of their rivals in poetical reputation, these two respected each other and remained life-long friends, so much so that their remains rest close to one another to-day in one and the same grave-yard at Hyderabad, as those of the two best representatives of their age in the domain of Urdu *Ghazal*.

The chief event in the life of Dagh at Rampur, from a literary point of view, was his contact with Amir. Without such a strong competition, probably the best in him would have remained dormant. In competition both the poets had to strain every nerve. Of all the collections of Dagh's *ghazals*, I think, on the whole, the best and most characteristic specimen of his writing is the *Gulzar-i-Dagh* composed during his stay at Rampur. He shines in it at his best. It is full of *ghazals* depicting various phases of love with a masterly psychological analysis. The *ghazals* are most of them admirably fitted for being sung with the accompaniment of music and have found great favour with the musicians and singers in the country. This fact, has, no doubt, contributed, to a considerable extent, to Dagh's great popularity and has made his name a house-hold word. Some people attribute his fame to this and say that if the singers had not taken up his *ghazals* he would have been less of a general favourite. They are of opinion

that to some extent this is derogatory to his dignity as a literary man and a poet. I do not think this view is correct. It is no demerit if he is favoured by musicians and singers. His *ghazals* appealed to them as likely to catch ; they tried them and found they were universally liked. There is thus the seal of popular favour on his verses, and they combine simplicity of style with effect and, in their own way, are true to nature and depict phases of life and love with unerring exactness.

Dagh continued to live at Rampur after the death of Nawab Kalb-i-Ali Khan. Certain retrenchments in the expenditure of the State necessitated the reduction of the posts occupied by poets and literary men, including Dagħ, and thus when he was above 45, he once more found himself left to his own resources and without any reliable means of income. He came back to Delhi and after a short stay there he made up his mind to go to Hyderabad Deccan. The late Nizam, Mir Mahbub Ali Khan, *Asaf*, was on the throne. He was very fond of poetry and was himself a talented poet. It was, however, not easy to find access to him and whoever desired to get into his Court had to wait fairly long for this privilege. Dagħ first went to Hyderabad in 1888, but came back to Delhi without having secured an interview with the Nizam. However, he was called soon and appointed to guide and help the Nizam in his poetical compositions. He started with the salary of Rs. 450 a month, which rose eventually to about two thousand rupees per mensem, a scale of pay, which has not been known before or since in India, as a salary for a man of letters as such.

This munificence of the late Nizam not only freed Dagh from care as to his means of livelihood for the rest of his life, but made him the envy of a large number of his compeers. His unique success and good luck produced many opponents and detractors, who began to find fault with his writings and to grudge him his popularity, but they could not do him any harm. His reputation had been already too well established to be shaken by such attacks and his position in the Court of the Nizam did not depend on any extraneous influences.

Living at Hyderabad in assured affluence, Dagh retained his old-world simplicity of life and his gentle suavity of manners. His work, during the last eighteen years of his life spent in Hyderabad, could divide itself into three heads, and was hard enough for a man who embarked on it at a time when many people retire from life. First and foremost came the amendment and improvement of the *ghazals* of his royal master. This he used to call *Kar-i-Sarkar* or Government work. The Nizam's *ghazals* would reach him from time to time in sealed covers and it would be expected that he would return them as early as possible with his suggestions. Those who know how difficult it is to improve another's composition, with due regard to the retention of the characteristics of the author's style, would realise the difficulty of this task. Add to it the fact that the author who sent his manuscripts in this instance was no less a personage than the Nizam, who was himself possessed of a fastidious literary taste, and it would be clear that this part of Dagh's

work must have considerably taxed his brain. His hours of leisure, from what may be called his official literary work, were devoted either to his own poems or to the correction of those of his numerous pupils throughout India, most of whom sent their verses to him by post and got back corrected manuscripts from him. This was a very heavy duty, which the amiable and good-natured poet took on himself most selflessly. It grew into a regular institution and with the rise of his name and fame the number of his pupils became very large. Some of them had never set their eyes on him. They became his pupils by correspondence. He maintained an establishment, honorary as well as paid, for coping with this vast correspondence under his supervision. He read the letters of his correspondents, dictated replies to them, amended *ghazals* enclosed with them, where necessary, and those which he found not requiring any corrections had to be returned all the same to the authors with necessary remarks. If owing to other work or indisposition the replies to letters or the amendment of *ghazals* were delayed, the correspondents sent reminders, sometimes bitterly complaining of being neglected. However such was his sweet nature that he often sent apologetic letters in reply, instead of simply declining to perform this honorary work if it was to be made a hard task for him.

I had the privilege once of seeing Dagh at Hyderabad, when I paid a short visit to the Nizam's capital and made a point of having an interview with the famous poet of the Deccan Court. He was quite pleased to see me when he

came to know that I was connected, as I then was, with journalism. Referring to this work of correspondence with numerous poets who applied to him for guidance, he said to me :—

*“ Ek main hun aur Sara Hindustan lipta hua hai.”*

i.e., “ Here am I, one solitary individual, and the whole of (literary) India is clinging to me.”

He inquired eagerly about Iqbal, who in his student days had got into correspondence with Dagh. The poet naturally felt proud of counting Iqbal among his pupils. Iqbal's fame as a poet was then rising, though it had not yet reached the height it subsequently attained. Dagh said he had found great promise even in the early *ghazals* of Iqbal, but the new line that he had struck for himself under the influence of his Western education was entirely his own and should be a revelation to the older generation.

About that time Dagh had written a Qasida, as a eulogy of his august master. A writer in a Punjab newspaper adversely criticised that poem, taking it up line by line in several issues of the paper and tried to show that there was hardly a line in the whole poem which was free from defects of composition, or grammar or idiom. I asked Dagh if he had seen that criticism and what he thought of it. He smiled and said : “ It would have been worth something if the critic had found fault with some of my verses and admitted others to be correct enough, but the fellow has not the sense to see that an old man who has spent all his life in writing verses, cannot have them all wrong.”

Syed Ali Ahsan, of Marehra, who is one of



the foremost pupils of Dagh and a great admirer of his, has written a short biography of the poet, known as *Jalwa-i-Dagh*. I wish he had attempted something more detailed, but so far as it goes, it gives a very good account of the work of Dagh during his last years. Ahsan was staying with him at Hyderabad, with the definite object of compiling a small Urdu dictionary, called "*Fasih-ul-Lughat*", which would illustrate the use of Urdu words and idioms by verses of Dagh. He gave it this name, as the title of *Fasih-ul-Mulk* had been conferred on Dagh by the Nizam and he was commonly known by this title. This gave Dagh an extra work. Whenever a verse from those of his works, which were already extant, was not to be found, a verse had to be improvised to illustrate the use of the expression in question, in order to complete the task of the lexicographer. By this work, however, I think both the master and his disciple rendered an appreciable service to the Urdu language. They have given us material which the lexicographer of the future will find helpful.

The collection of Dagh's poems, which was published as the result of his literary labours in Hyderabad is known as the "*Mahtab-i-Dagh*". It was neatly printed on fine paper and had the impress of the Deccan on it. Opinions differ as to the relative merits of the three best known Diwans of Dagh. The *Gulzar* (or the Rose-garden), as we have already seen, consisted of the effusions of his youth, when love was not a mere play of fancy and imagination to him, but a reality, presumably felt and experienced. The *Afiab* (or the Sun) too

belongs to pretty nearly the same period as the first collection and is resplendent with shining and bright word pictures of mental conditions. The *Mahtab* (or the Moon), while lacking the over-powering fragrance of the garden and the brilliant lustre of the Sun, is true to its name and sheds the mellow and cool light of the moon, betokening the calm atmosphere of a happy and contented old age. You see, however, in this latest publication the mature touches of an acknowledged master, and it is not wanting in any of the essential and characteristic beauties of Dagh's *ghazals*. While this was the last publication for which the poet was himself responsible, two more collections have seen the light, since his death. One is the "*Yadgar-i-Dagh*", collected as a result of Ahsan's devotion to the memory of his master, and another, collected by the enterprise of Lala Siri Ram, M. A. This collection is added by Lala Siri Ram to a neatly got up reprint of the *Mahtab-i-Dagh*. Another collection called *Diwan-i-Dagh* was published by the Anwar-i-Muhammadi Press, Lucknow, which consisted of selections from Dagh. The importance of these later collections, to my mind; mainly consists in completing the known stock of *ghazals* of the famous poet, as numerous admirers of Dagh all over the country would like to preserve the whole of his work; otherwise they can add but little to the reputation established by the three well-known *Diwans* of Dagh. Talking of the collection, known as the *Yadgar-i-Dagh*, it may be mentioned that this book is not to be confused with another small book of the same name, published at Agra by Muhammad Akbar Ali Khan, *Afsun*,

which gives a short sketch of the author's career and extracts from his works. Of the short, sketches of Dagh's life, the booklet known as "*Dagh-i-Dehlavi*" by Sayad Muhammad Faruq, gives a readable account of Dagh's life and work in a short compass.

This notice of Dagh's work will remain incomplete if we do not mention the. "*Faryad-i-Dagh*", (or the *Plaint of Dagh*). This is a continuous poem, written in the style of a *masnavi*, dealing with an episode of his life, on which, I notice, all three writers of his biographical sketches, to whom reference has been made above, have tried to draw a veil. The reason is that the episode relates to a period when Dagh felt drawn to a lady-singer of Calcutta, who was not only well-versed in her art of singing, but was possessed of culture and literary taste and wrote verses under the name of *Hijab*. It seems the attraction was mutual. There was nothing strange and unnatural about this attraction, whatever verdict may be pronounced on it by convention. Hijab as a singer must have been familiar with the *ghazals* of Dagh, so admirably suited to music. Possibly in her own verses she was imitating him as a model. I believe he first saw her at Rampur in a fair. He went subsequently to Calcutta and they saw one another again. This contact disclosed to both the points of affinity between the two spirits whose lot had been cast so differently. During his stay at Calcutta, Dagh seems to have developed familiarity with her and to have received a lasting impression on his mind, of which he sings in the "*Faryad*," in such a frank way, that no one can or should

misunderstand him. He hints more than plainly that Hijab made it clear to him that it was not his dark complexion or his ordinary features that she admired, but she admired him as an artist in words. On the other hand Dagh was not quite a youth to be enamoured of her personal appearance. He too admired her capacity to appreciate literature and her desire to cultivate the acquaintance of talented men. This acquaintance proved short-lived and they parted when Dagh's brief sojourn at Calcutta came to a close. N'othing more came of it till the very end of Dagh's life, when, I am told, Hijab, as an aged lady, came to pay her homage to her ideal poet, when he was about seventy. Looking at the episode in this light, I, for one, do not see anything, of which the poet or his biographers need feel ashamed, and I have thought it necessary to mention this, as some of the allusions in his verses cannot be fully understood without knowing something about this story. The *masnavi* dealing with this affair, it is said, did not take the poet long to write. Fresh from his first impressions of the incident, it was easy for him to give vent to his feelings. He does so with a simplicity, which it is difficult to excel; and yet in the few simple words of which each short line consists, you see a good deal of feeling and sense compressed. There is no trace of any effort in the whole poem. It is an effusion, pure and simple. Even the part of it, which is formal and would ordinarily be very dry, has a ring of originality about it. For instance it is a common usage for poets to begin their works with some verses in praise of their literary patron,

whom they call the *Mamduh* or the person eulogised. Here Dagh had to write in praise of the Nawab of Rampur and of his capital, where he had spent so many happy years of his life.

The following simple lines of the poem offer a vivid contrast to the exaggerated praise, which is generally associated with Oriental eulogies :—

ہم عجب شہر مصطفیٰ آباد اسکو رکھنا میرے خدا آباد  
سب اسے رام پور کہتے ہیں ہم تو آرام پور کہتے ہیں  
خیر نواب کی مناتے ہیں جسکا کہاتے ہیں اسکا گاتے ہیں

("Mustafabad (Rampur) is a wonderful city,  
"May God keep it flourishing.

"People give it the name of Rampur,

"I call it Arampur (Full of Aram, i.e., comfort).

"I pray for the welfare of the Nawab,

"And, as the proverb goes, 'We sing the praises of him who feeds us.'").

The lines in which Dagh deals with عشق (love), are so pretty that it is difficult to find a parallel to them in the writings of any other contemporary, in simplicity, in force and in their flowing melody.

I do not think it is possible for me, in the limited space at my disposal, to dwell at length on the *Faryad* or to give a detailed criticism of it. I would recommend it to those, who are not familiar with it already, to read it. My own estimate of it, as I have indicated above, is very high, and I think that this brief effusion of Dagh would

have been enough to give him a title to fame as a writer of Urdu poetry, even if he had not left three fairly big Diwans behind him.

As a master of Urdu idiom and as one capable of stringing together the simplest words with the greatest effect, it is difficult to find any one in modern times, who has excelled Dagh. His verses, while retaining the best features of Zauq's style, are more brilliant and original in their forms of expression.

Mir is regarded on all hands as the most gifted among the ancients in writing touching and pathetic verse and Sauda as the most talented in writing the most piquant style. In many of his verses Dagh combines the excellences of both the old masters. His desire to make use of idiomatic expressions sometimes leads him to use slang, which is not worthy of his position, and which has often been made the object of adverse criticism; but there is so little of this weakness that it does not deserve very serious notice. Similarly there are some verses in his Diwan, which cannot be approved of by the puritan and the moralist; but when it is remembered that he never professed to write didactic poetry and never took up the role of a teacher, this defect can be overlooked. Even after eliminating verses to which objection may be taken, there remains sufficient material in his Diwans which is preservable and full of literary merit. Verses, in which he either analyses, with rare success, the working of the human mind or embodies in pithy and telling words the results of human wisdom and experience, abound in his writings and will for ever be the delight of the readers of

Urdu verse. The three Diwans of Dagh may be read with advantage. In him and Amir the reader would see the *ghazal* at its best. Dagh's eminent position in the domain of *ghazal* was recognised by all the best writers of his time. Hali says in a *ghazal* mourning the grandeur of old Delhi :

داغ و معجروح کوسن لو کہ پھر اس گلشن میں  
نہ سنیگا کوئی بلبل کا ترانہ ہرگز

Amir, in a *ghazal*, in which he paid Dagh the compliment of writing in the same strain in which Dagh had written already, gave him a fine tribute in the *Maqala*. He says :—

امیر اچوی نزل ہے داغ کی جسکا یہ مصرع ہے  
بہویں تنتی ہیں خنجر ہاتھ میں ہے تن کے بیٹھے ہیں

It will be difficult in modern times to find many examples of such devotion to literature as Dagh displayed throughout his life. He lived and died as an Oriental poet. Born on the 25th of May 1831, he died on the 14th of February 1905, at Hyderabad. His death caused a universal mourning in literary circles throughout the country and very large number of elegies were written on his death. The most impressive of these was written by Dr. Iqbal, who says that the power of subtle analysis of the workings of the human mind is the most distinguishing feature of the poetry of Dagh. In the following beautiful words, Iqbal alludes to the pictures of love drawn by the last poetical genius of Delhi :—

الہینکے آذر ہزاروں شعر کے بتخانے سے  
مے پلانینگے نئے ساقی نئے دیمانے سے

لکڑی جائینگے کتاب دل کی تفسیریں بہت  
 ہونگی اے خواب جوانی تیری تعبیریں بہت  
 ہو بہو کوہینچیکا لیکن عشق کی تصویر کون  
 اٹھ گیا ناوک فگن ماریگا دل پر تیر کون

(Thousands of Azars' will arise from the idol-house of verse,

New Saqis will distribute wine in new cups, .

Many commentaries will be written on the book of the human heart,

There will be many interpretations of the dream of youth,

But who will paint faithfully the picture of love?

The master archer is gone.

Who will now pierce the heart with his unerring darts.)

---

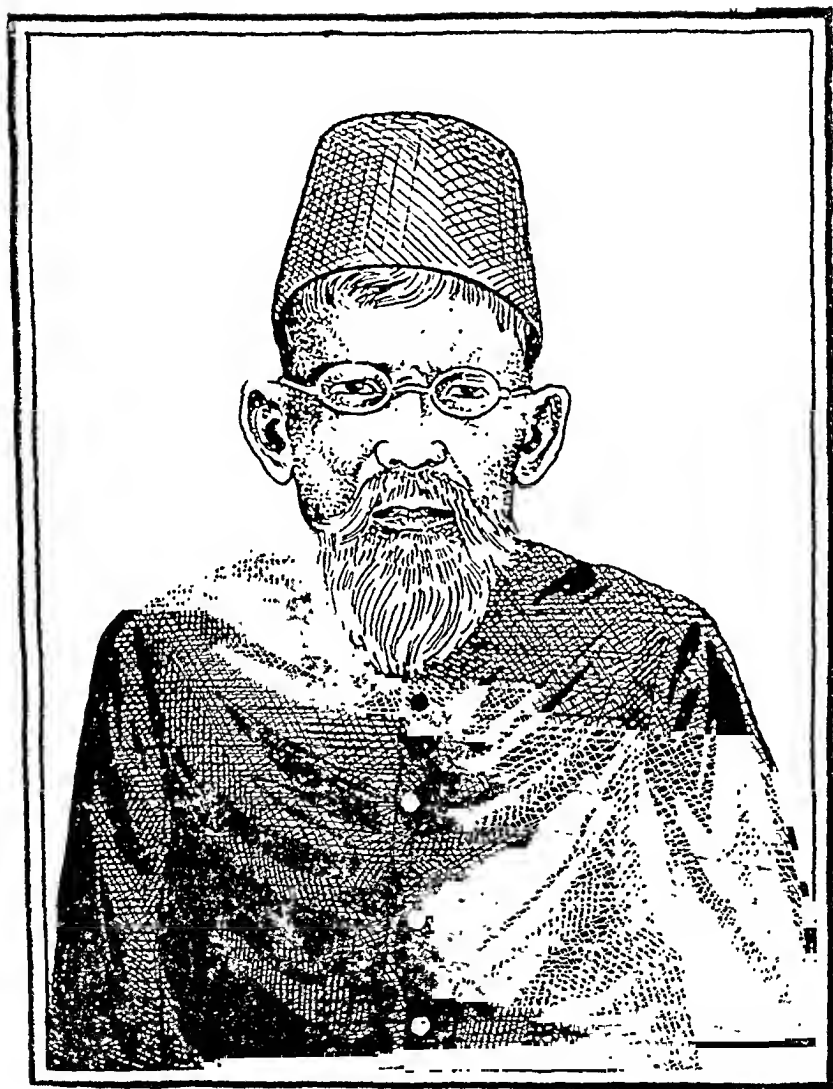
1. Azar was the reputed father of the Prophet Abraham. According to some he was the uncle of Abraham and had brought him up. Azar was a maker of idols, but the youth brought up by him realised the unity of God and became the "Father of Prophets."



## Akbar Allahabadi

Syed Akbar Husain, of Allahabad, who has given to the world so many memorable poems in Urdu, under the *nom de plume* of *Akbar*, is regarded as one of the greatest of modern Urdu writers. As one who represents the spirit of the present age and gives a frank and fearless expression to the sentiments that are uppermost in many a thinking mind in India in these times, he is without a rival in the realm of Urdu literature and richly deserves the title of *Lisan-ul-Asr* which is now his by common consent. *Lisan-ul-Asr* (or "the Voice of the Period"), was a happy epithet which was once applied to him in the pages of the *Makhzan*. The Urdu press liked the expression and adopted it and the title is now constantly used with reference to this eminent poet. It describes him very aptly and brings out the most distinguishing feature of his writings. He represents the reaction of the East against the influence of the West, particularly so far as the influence on Indian Musulmans is concerned, and as such his writings possess a more than ordinary interest for the students of Urdu.

A brief notice of the life of Syed Akbar Husain will not be out of place, before we discuss his poetical works. Born at Bara in the U.P. in 1845, in a respectable Syed family, he had a more



Akbar Allahabadi

service, as a copyist. In 1867 he passed his first examination in law, which entitled him to practise as a pleader, but he did not practise as such, because soon after his examination he was appointed a Naib-Tahsildar. In 1870 he got the appointment of a Reader in the High Court, where his knowledge of English and of law improved considerably. In 1873 he passed an examination qualifying him to be a Vakil of the Allahabad High Court and he started practice as a Vakil. In 1880 he re-entered Government service as a Munsiff, in which capacity he was posted at Aligarh for some time. This posting was arranged specially at the request of the late Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and his then co-adjutor Maulvi Samiullah Khan, who wanted to make use of the talents and ability of Syed Akbar Husain in the great educational work they had started at Aligarh. They had evidently heard of his fame and expected to find in him a co-operator, who would be a great source of strength to them. In this, however, they were destined to be disappointed. The old sage of Aligarh and the young poet became very good personal friends, but in their ideals of public life and education Sir Syed and Syed Akbar Husain represented two opposite schools of thought and the poet never became reconciled to Sir Syed's way of thinking. His poetry, however, received a great impetus by coming in contact with Syed Ahmad Khan and the name of the Syed and his work inspired many interesting and readable poems of Akbar. In the College that was being established at Aligarh, Akbar saw an embodiment of Western influence and he began to

warn people against being fascinated by the outward attractions of Western education and becoming unmindful of spiritual progress or of national self-respect. In the beginning those of his poems which were inspired by a sense of alarm, at the success of Sir Syed's propaganda, did not find favour, except in the camp that was openly hostile to the efforts of Sir Syed, but gradually the trend of public opinion underwent a great change in favour of Syed Akbar Husain, and his voice, though solitary, gained very much in weight, so that it is now generally recognised that he has done a distinct service by acting as a sort of a brake on the speed with which a certain class of educated Musulmans were trying to slavishly and blindly imitate the West. Akbar does not try to ignore the service rendered by Syed Ahmad Khan to the cause of education. He recognises that the aim of the latter was to work for the uplift of his community. His quarrel is with the method of work adopted at Aligarh. He points out that mere book knowledge or mere lip sympathy and outward respect for religion cannot make young men religious. He emphasises the value of personal influence in matters pertaining to religion. A glance from a man leading a saintly life, he says, can create religion in a youthful mind, but religion cannot be created by books or the buildings of a College :

نہ کتابوں سے نہ کالج کے ہے تر سے پیدا

دین ہوتا ہے بزرگوں کی نظر سے پیدا

He laments, in another place, the tendency of those receiving Western education to lose all the

inner good qualities of their fathers, while retaining an outward affinity to them.

رنک چہرے کا تو کالج نے بڑی رکھا قائم  
رنک باطن میں مگر باپ سے بیٹا نہ ملا

This illustrates the turn his thoughts took in consequence of his contact with the College at Aligarh, but we shall examine some more specimens of his thoughts later, as we have to resume the brief narrative of his life. Syed Akbar Husain was promoted to be a Sub-Judge in 1888 and was appointed a Judge of the Court of Small Causes at Allahabad in 1894. He was selected for a District and Sessions Judgeship in the same year and worked in that capacity at Allahabad, Jhansi, Menpuri, Benares and Saharanpur. He had a chance of getting to the highest rung of the Judicial ladder. In fact it was understood that on the retirement of Mr. Justice Aikman of the Allahabad High Court, he would succeed to a seat on the High Court Bench, but he retired from service before that, owing to some trouble with his eyes. Ever since his retirement, his life has been devoted to religion and to literary pursuits and he has bequeathed to us a good deal of his wisdom and experience in verses, most of which are as humorous as they are effective. He is now fairly old, being six and seventy.<sup>1</sup> About the end of his life he aged faster than he would have done owing to the sad bereavements experienced by him by the death of his wife, for whom he cared very much and of his second son Syed Hashim Husain of whom he was very fond. But

<sup>1</sup> This refers to the time when this lecture was delivered.

in spite of such adverse circumstances his brain remained active, his imagination fertile and his fund of humour quite unexhausted. In verses from his pen, which occasionally find their way to the Press, even now you do not ordinarily see traces of old age or decay. He is a good correspondent and keeps in touch, through correspondence, with a large number of literary men in India. His letters, however, are written in a vein very much different from the humorous style which you see in so many of his verses. The letters are almost always written in a serious strain, complaining of physical ailments incidental to age, of mental troubles connected with the bereavements mentioned above, and looking heavenwards more than towards the earth and things earthly. I have seen a good many of his letters as I have had the privilege of having a good many of them addressed to me or to some of my friends. If a selected collection<sup>1</sup> of his letters is published it would give his future admirers a true idea of his personality.

The first collection of his poems was published under the name of *Kulliat-i-Akbar* in 1908. It was followed by an edition of his *Rubaiat* or quatrains, published by the *Makhzan* Press. A second part of the *Kulliat*, consisting of *Ghazals* and other pieces which had not been published in the first collection of 1908 or which had been subsequently written, came out in 1912, and I understand a third part of the *Kulliat* is now in Press and will bring in his later compositions. These publications owe a good deal to the enterprise of Syed Ishrat Husain, the elder son of Syed Akbar Husain.

---

<sup>1</sup> This has been done since.

Syed Ishrat Husain has been educated at Cambridge and has inherited a taste for literature from his father. His visit to Europe has been the source of inspiration of many fine verses written by his father. Syed Ishrat Husain has made the editions of the *Kulliat* interesting by giving, whenever necessary, the time at which certain poems were written. I am told Akbar began to write verse when he was a mere boy of twelve, thus showing that he was gifted by nature. The specimens of his *Ghazals* written at the age of 19 are published in the *Kulliat* Part I and show distinct promise and power. None of the ideas which marked him out later as one of the Masters of a new school of poetry are to be found in his early writings, but, judged by the old standards prevailing in Urdu poetry, many lines written by him as a youth of 19 would have done credit even to a maturer poet of the old school.

It was in 1866, that Akbar came out before the public for the first time as a writer of good *Ghazals*, when one of his *Ghazals* was recited at a poetical contest and elicited general applause. He continued to write *Ghazals* of the ordinary type for several years, till under circumstances, which have been alluded to above, his thoughts took a definite turn and he began to write with an end in view.

Before noticing such specimens of his poetry as have been written with the object of influencing public opinion in various ways, I think it necessary to refer to a poem of his in which he rendered into Urdu verse Southey's well-known poem on 'Waters of Ladore.' I came across this translation

long ago in the columns of some periodical and it was a revelation to me of what could be accomplished in Urdu by a talented writer with a good command of his language. As the vocabulary of Urdu is not very large, many people think it is difficult to translate successfully the writings of English authors into Urdu. Akbar's rendering of such a piece of poetry, as the poem of Southey, painting a word picture of the flow of water from the hills to a valley, shows the great possibilities of Urdu in the domain of expression.

This translation, while revealing the powers of the Urdu language, shows to a still greater extent the command which Akbar has on it, and I think this translation of his will long be remembered as one of the most remarkable poems in Urdu, for the author has made it his own to such an extent, that but for the acknowledgment of its source made by himself no one who is not acquainted with the original, could say that it was a translation. It is a good sample of what may be done in Urdu by way of describing the beauties of nature. If Urdu poets have done comparatively little in that line hitherto, it is really because this style of writing was not in demand, but with the growth of a demand for word painting in descriptions of natural scenery, there is no reason why Urdu writers should not do well in this direction. We see many beautiful pieces of natural poetry in the writings of *Anis* and among the more modern writers, Azad, Hali and Akbar have shown considerable power, whenever they have tried to describe nature. A poem in which Akbar describes his watching of the movements of two pretty



butterflies and the reflections that occurred to him, is very interesting.

Coming now to the main characteristics of Akbar's poetry, I think, we can divide them into several heads, though I must confess that he has so many subtle peculiarities that it is very difficult to attempt anything like an exhaustive enumeration. The main heads, however, are:—

- (a) his fondness for wit and humour and at times even for sarcasm and satire;
- (b) his originality of thought and expression;
- (c) his ardent, though subdued, patriotism, and
- (d) his deep and fervent love of religion.

There is another peculiarity of his, which has more to do with the outward garb than the substance of his poetical effusions and that is his capacity to press the English language into his service. At times he uses English words in Urdu with great effect. At other times this tendency lands him into difficulties and has brought into existence lines in which the English words used do not fit and which are not calculated to enhance his reputation as a writer of Urdu.

We might discuss the above characteristics one by one. It seems Akbar has a natural tendency for putting things humorously. He does so most often without any effort, though at times there are traces of effort visible and to that extent the effect is spoiled. His famous quatrain on the observance of *parda* by women is an instance of his effortless humour—

ہر عورت کو چاہیے کہ پردہ کرے  
وہ جس کو چاہے اس کو چاہے کرے

پوچھا جو ان سے آپکا پردہ وہ کیا ہوا  
کہنے لگیں کہ عقل پہ مردوں کی پڑ گیا

“Some (Indian) ladies were seen yesterday without their veils and Akbar felt as if sinking into the ground by the shock thus caused to his national susceptibilities. He asked them what had become of their veil and they said that the veil had fallen on the senses of men.”

As a specimen of his satire on the undue desire which most people have now a days for publicity, the following simple line is difficult to beat:—

دیکھو جسے وہ پانیہ آفس میں ہے ڈٹا  
لہ میرا نام کہیں چھاپ دیجئے

Another line, which occurs to me as illustrating his humorous way of describing things, illustrates his originality of thought and expression. You know very well that in Urdu as well as in Persian, wine is known as *دخت زر*, i.e., “the daughter of the grape.” Akbar has made a very pretty use of this metaphor in commenting on the evil effects of wine:

اس کی بیٹی نے اٹھا رکھی ہے دنیا سر پر  
خیریت گذری کہ انگور کے بیٹا نہ ہوا

(The daughter of the grape has produced such a turmoil in the world—what a blessing that the grape was not gifted with a son). There is a subtle allusion here to the popular Indian notion that daughters are mild and gentle and do not give trouble, while sons often turn out to be wild and turbulent.

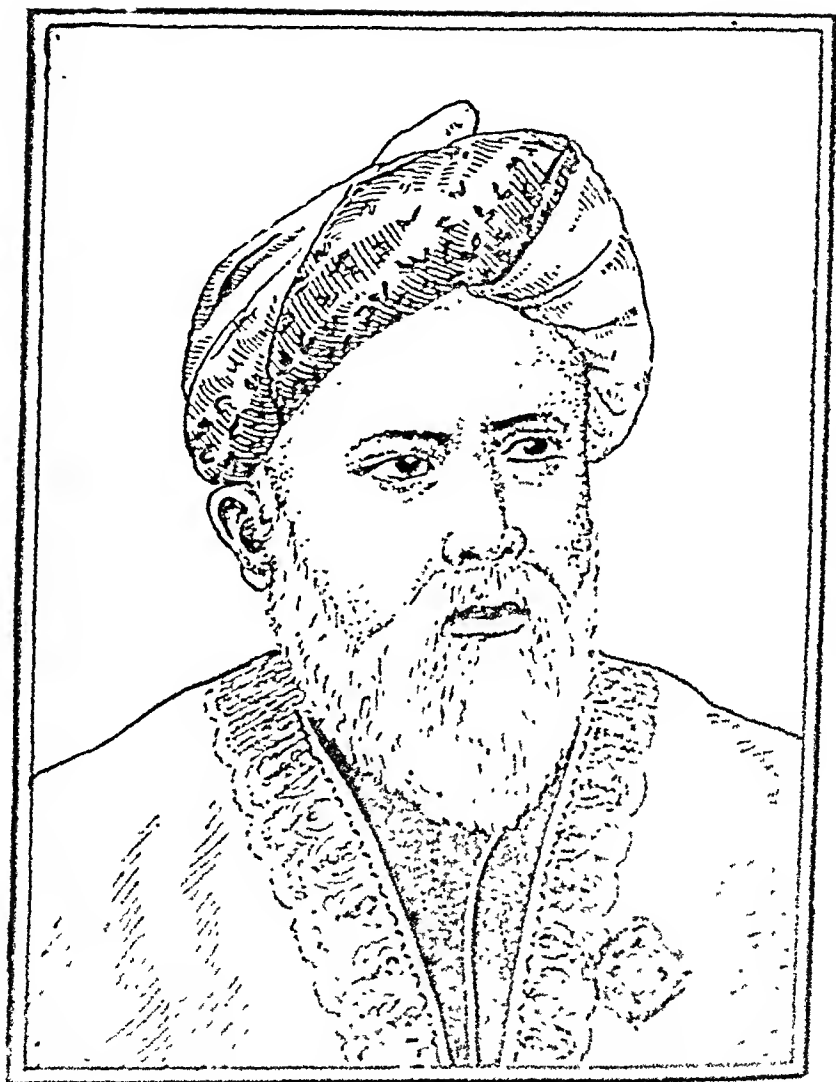
collection of the poems of a poet like *Akbar*. It may be expected that in any subsequent edition the pruning knife will be more carefully used and the poems will be free from anything which may be unworthy of such a good writer.

Though jealous of the rights of his own nation, Akbar was by temperament and training a friend of the British. He has much in his writings which shows the esteem and admiration he has for the British nation. He tells his countrymen that they may take all that is good and all that is useful for them from the civilisation of the West, provided they do not do so at the expense of their own. In many ways he is inclined to be too conservative and too orthodox. I have reproduced a quatrain of his about *pardah*. This is a pet subject with him. There are many among the educated Moslems who do not see eye to eye with him on this subject, and who desire at least a relaxation of the bonds of *pardah*, but the forces of conservatism on this point as represented by Akbar have been strong so far. Akbar is, however, conscious that a change is likely to come and predicts it in a tone half-resigned to what he regards as inevitable, when he says: "Akbar is, no doubt, a supporter of *pardah*, but how long can he or his quatrains last?"

---

1. Alas! One part of his prophecy has come true and Akbar, who was alive when this lecture was delivered, is no more. The quatrain, as a piece of literature will last long, but their effect, so far as the question referred to above is concerned is already on the decline.





Moulvi Nareer Ahmad

## Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad

As a master of Urdu prose there is hardly any one who can rival the fame which Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad Dehlavi has achieved. His knowledge of the Urdu language, as spoken in Indian homes by ladies of the upper and middle classes, is unequalled, and he has made a good use of it in the books with which he has enriched the store of Urdu literature. He is called Dehlavi, because Delhi was his adopted home, but it was not his parental home. He belonged to a small village in Bijnaur district, in the U. P. His family was known for its learning and piety. He was born in 1836 of the Christian era. His father, Maulvi Saadat Ali Khan, was a good scholar of Persian, from whom he had his first lessons in that language and inherited a taste for it. He went to Delhi for his education in Arabic and stayed in a mosque. Students in mosques in those days were expected to perform domestic duties in the houses of their teachers and they depended for their food on the help given to them by people living in the neighbourhood of the mosques. The case of Nazeer Ahmad was no exception. It is interesting to learn in this connection that Nazeer Ahmad had to carry about in his lap a little girl, who became his wife when he grew up, as his

teacher liked his hard-working habits and his good character.

The family of Nazeer Ahmad did not like the going of any Muslim boys to institutions run on Western lines and his education would have remained within the limits of the school in the mosque, but by chance he went one day to the Delhi College and was offered a scholarship to complete his studies there. He took advantage of the offer and joined the institution and has been one of its best products.

Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad began life as a teacher in a small school at Kunjah, in Gujrat district, in the Punjab. After two years of service at Kunjah, he was appointed as Deputy Inspector of Schools at Cawnpore, but his work there was interrupted by the Mutiny of 1857. His wife and all her relatives were in Delhi. He went and joined them and shared some of the bitter experiences of that troubled year. When peace was re-established, Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad was re-employed at Allahabad as Deputy Inspector of Schools. A friend of his, with whom he was putting up there, persuaded him to learn English. He began to study English at the age of twenty three and acquired a working knowledge of it in a short period. In his leisure hours he continued to improve the knowledge thus acquired. Eventually he knew English sufficiently well to be able to translate books from English into Urdu.

The first occasion on which his capacity to translate was put to the test was when Sir William Muir, who was at that time the Lieutenant Governor of the North Western Provinces, now known

as the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, desired to have an Urdu translation of the Income Tax Act. It was successfully translated by Nazeer Ahmad. Later a Board was appointed to translate the Indian Penal Code into Urdu and Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad was appointed a member of that Board. His share in that work was greater than that of any other man. His mastery of Urdu, Persian and Arabic, combined with a good knowledge of English, stood him in good stead in performing this special duty with credit. As a recognition of his ability, Government decided to give him an appointment in the Revenue department, in which he worked at first as a Tehsildar and then as a Deputy Collector. A translation of the Criminal Procedure Code was also rendered by him, but the translation for which he deserves even greater credit than for these books of law, is the translation of an English book of Mr. Golman, called "The Heavens". The Urdu translation was called the *Samavat*. The story as to how this book carried his fame outside the N. W. P. is particularly interesting. The Government of the N. W. P. had announced a reward of Rs. 1000/- for this translation, but when Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad's translation was completed, a reward of Rs. 400/- was offered to him, as some grudging or incompetent official, who had been consulted by Government as an expert, reported that the translation was fairly good but "not upto the mark". This was not only disappointing to the talented translator, but insulting, as the merit of his work was not fully recognised. His disappointment did not, however, last long, owing to an intervention from



an unexpected quarter, duly recognising the worth of the *Samavat*, and creating for the translator the chance of being elevated to a high office in Hyderabad (Deccan).

The Administration of Hyderabad (Deccan) was then in the able hands of Sir Salar Jang I, as Prime Minister, and the well-known scholar, Syed Husain Bilgrami, was the trusted adviser of the Government of the Nizam on literary and educational questions. The book which Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad had translated was sent to Hyderabad, through the Resident, for being corrected, and was referred to Syed Husain Bilgrami (afterwards Nawab Imadul Mulk). The latter was very favourably impressed by its beautifully idiomatic language, and he declared that he did not agree with the opinion of the expert consulted by the N.W. P. Government. In his opinion the translation was excellent. This resulted in a belated recognition of the book by the N.W.P. Government. Some time after this, in 1877, a high appointment in the Revenue Department in Hyderabad was offered to Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad. He went and distinguished himself in his new sphere as he had done in his previous positions. Gradually his reputation as a scholar which had preceded him, and his mastery of the pen, began to be utilised in the Deccan in various ways.

The writing of story books on which the fame of Nazeer Ahmad as a writer chiefly rests, had begun when he was a Deputy Collector in the N. W. P., several years before he went to Hyderabad. The first book which brought him honour and recognition is the *Miratul Urus* (or the

Bride's Mirror). This story gives an account of two imaginary characters, Asghari and Akbari, the former a girl of well-regulated ideas and habits and the latter a wayward and undisciplined daughter of the same family. Asghari's good manners won for her great popularity in the house of her parents-in-law, when she was married, while her sister Akbari had to suffer for her shortcomings when she went to her husband's house. The aim of the author was to guide girls in learning good manners, without making the book an obtrusive book of advice.

The way in which the writing of the *Miratul Urris* started deserves special mention. Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad felt that there were no good books specially suited to the requirements of girls. For his own daughters, who were reading Urdu with him, he began to write a story. His daughters found his descriptions of the house of the family described by him and the talks between the members of the family, so interesting and true to life that they used frequently to ask him to tell them a little more of the story. Chapters of the book were thus being written, one after another, under the pressing demand of the daughters of the author. Many neighbours heard of the interest thus aroused in the minds of the girls and they asked them to lend them the manuscript, so that other girls may make copies of it and read it at their own homes. The book was thus known and appreciated in a small circle, before it attracted the notice of the N. W. P. Government and fetched a prize of one thousand rupees.

and became a very popular book when it was published.<sup>1</sup>

The story of how this book came to the notice of the Government is also worth relating. Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad was serving at Jhansi when the then Director of Public Instruction came on tour. He was camping outside the town. The Maulvi's son, Bashiruddin Ahmad, who was a little boy at the time, was passing by the camp, when the Director asked him if he was a student and if so what book he was studying. The boy said he was reading a book called *Chand Pand*. The Director said he had not heard of any book of that name. The boy replied that it was a small book of advices which his father had written for him. The Director expressed a desire to see the book. Bashiruddin Ahmad went to his house and fetched the book, but as he felt that the manuscript of the *Miratul Urs* would be even more interesting, he took it with him along with the *Chand Pand*. The officer was so struck with the excellence of the book that he asked Maluvi Nazeer Ahmad to get a fair copy of it prepared for him and to send it to him. This was done. The Director laid the manuscript before the Lieutenant Governor, Sir William Muir, who already knew Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad. Sir William Muir found it very readable and useful. About two months after the visit of the Director to Jhansi, the author got a letter from him to the effect that the book was the first of its kind and had been awarded a prize of one thousand rupees.

1. For this detail and for the information in the paragraph that follows, I am indebted to the *Haat ul Nazeer*, a readable biography of Maulana Nazeer Ahmad, written by Syed Iftikhar Ali.

Later on the Lieutenant Governor publicly praised this book in a Darbar held at Agra in 1869, and gave the author a clock as a personal present from himself with the author's name inscribed on it. The *Miratul Urus* has since passed through numerous editions and hundreds of thousands of copies of this book have been sold throughout the length and breadth of India. It has been translated into English. It has also been translated into many Indian languages.

The popularity of Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad's first story book led to the writing of the *Binat un Naash*, which is almost a continuation of the first story. Asghari, who was the chief character in the first book, appears again in the role of a teacher of girls. This book has also been published many times and is popular, but it cannot be considered equal to the "Bride's Mirror." It appears that the author intended to make it suitable for students of a standard more advanced than that of the readers of his first book.

The *Taubatun Nasuh*, was the third book of this series. It is an instructive story, and is considered as one of the best specimens of the style of writing introduced by Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad. The success of these three stories created a great demand for other books from the pen of the same author and the *Ibnul Waqt*, the *Muhsinat* and *Ayama* followed in swift succession. They are all stories with a purpose. The *Ibnul Waqt* describes the difficulties of a man, who was born and bred in an old fashioned home, but who adopted the Western style of living and proved a misfit. The *Muhsinat*.

also known as the *Fisana-i-Mubtila*, was a story of an unfortunate man who married two wives and had constant worries and friction in his home life. The author wrote on the front page of the book the adage: "There is only one heart in human breast. It cannot be given to two persons". In the writing of this book, Maulvi Bashir-ud-din Ahmad, the only son of Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad, who was a well-educated young man by then, collaborated with his father. The *Ayana* laid stress on the re-marriage of widows.

There are many other writings of Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad, which could be mentioned, but in the interests of brevity only one more may be referred to. It is named *Mauiza-i-Hasana*. It is a collection of the letters which the author wrote to his son, from time to time, giving him advice and guidance in educational and cultural matters. It has benefited numerous youths besides the author's son.

In addition to the distinction attained by Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad in literature, the credit of producing a translation of the Quran in pure and idiomatic Urdu, belongs to him. The older translations were too literal to be easily understood by those who did not know Arabic. Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad took the bold step of rendering the Holy book into idiomatic Urdu, to enable Urdu knowing people to understand its meaning. He introduced parenthetical clauses here and there, to elucidate the meaning of the text. This work brought him even greater popularity than that acquired by him through his other books, but it

also aroused opposition from some theologians, who regarded any translation besides a strictly literal one as an unjustified interference with the Quran". The opposition of some theologians to Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad was further accentuated towards the end of his life, when he wrote the *Ummahat-ul-Ummah*, that is "the mothers of the faithful". This book was written to refute the criticism of a non-Muslim on the number of matrimonial relations contracted by the Prophet of Islam in the concluding years of his life. The author explained the reasons for those marriages and showed that they were not promoted by love of pleasure. Exception was taken by some Maulvis to a quotation in this book, which was considered disrespectful to the wives of the Prophet. An agitation was started against this publication, which forced the author to do away with all the copies of the book.

Apart from his writings, Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad had the unique distinction of being the greatest orator in Urdu. A volume of the lectures delivered by the Maulvi from time to time, in public meetings, has been published. Till his return to Delhi from Hyderabad, Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad had not discovered that he had the gift of oratory. At the annual meeting of the Tibbia College at Delhi he probably made his first public speech. He found that his tongue could wield even a greater influence than his pen, in moving the hearts of people. After that he was in demand at various places throughout the country. At Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, he made eloquent speeches. Aligarh and Lahore had more frequent

opportunities of benefiting by his oratory. Immense crowds used to gather at Lahore to hear him. He addressed large audiences, in a voice which could be clearly heard in every corner of the hall. Most of his speeches were made at the annual gatherings of the Moslem Educational Conference. The Anjuman-i-Hamayyat-i-Islam of Lahore also used to invite him every year for its anniversary meetings and his lectures were a specially attractive feature of its annual functions. He used to hold his audiences spell bound for two or three hours at a stretch.

Though Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad has made his mark as a master of prose, it must be mentioned that he had a fairly good capacity for writing verse. He does not appear to have written any *ghazals* or other popular poems, but he has written many lengthy pieces of verse, as preludes to his Urdu lectures or as supplements to them. The trend of the poems used to be the same as those of the lectures. In one of these poems he made all the points which he wanted to make, and added: "*Abhi hai nasr men Kehne ko asl-i-mudaa baqi*" (The real purpose of my address has still to be explained in prose). From matter of fact compositions of this kind much of real poetry cannot be expected, but there were occasional sparks of Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad's exceptionally sharp wit in his poems, which showed that he could have shone in poetry, if he had liked to do so.

As a man he led a quiet and simple life. He preferred the old fashioned life of Indian families to the modern style of living, which had come

into vogue in his time. He spent about twenty years after his retirement from Hyderabad in devoted voluntary service to the cause of literature. He departed from this life in 1912, full of years and honours, and his loss was mourned by hundreds of thousands of his grateful countrymen.



## Maulana Altaf Husain Hali

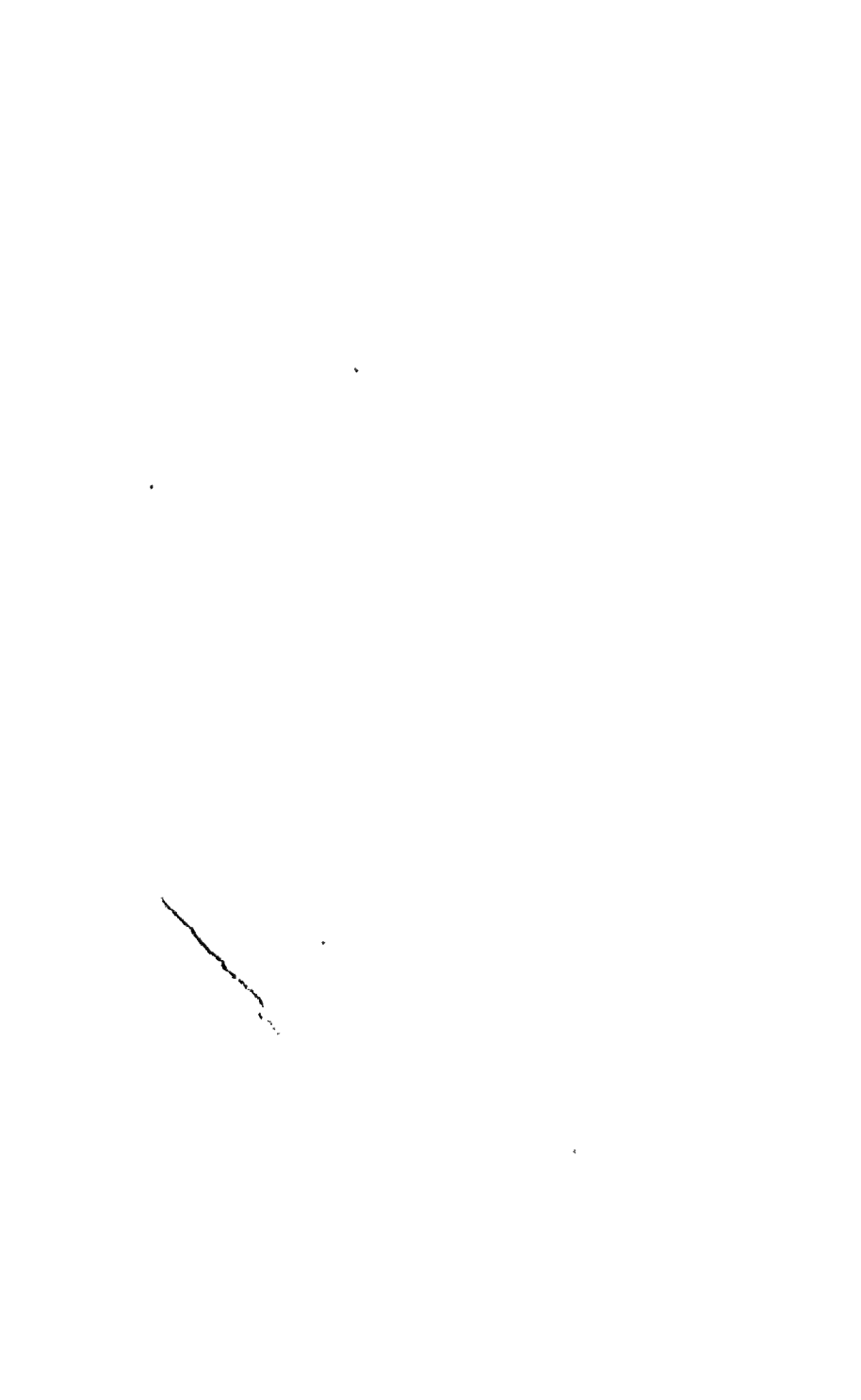
Among those to whom modern Urdu owes a permanent debt of gratitude, the name of Shams-ul-Ulama Maulana Altaf Husain, *Hali*, stands high. He has left Urdu literature purer in thought and expression than it was when he took upon himself the arduous task of reforming it and he has left behind a number of books in Urdu prose, which will long be remembered as valuable additions to the stock of Urdu literature. In the line of literary criticism he is a writer of recognised merit, whose writings have inspired and will inspire many an aspirant to literary fame with lofty ideals.

Altaf Husain was born at Panipat in 1837 and died in 1914, at the ripe age of 77, and has found his last resting place in the town of his birth, which he loved so well in his life and which had been the home of his ancestors for a long period. From a brief autobiographical note, which Maulana Hali had once prepared at the instance of Nawab Imadul Mulk Bilgrami, and a copy of which has been supplied to me by the courtesy of Hali's worthy son, Khwaja Sajjad Husain, B.A., Retired Inspector of Schools, I find that the family of Ansaris to which Hali belongs, has been resid-

1. Khawaja Sajjad Husain is now no more. He was a great educationist and had devoted himself to the progress of the school which was founded at Panipat to commemorate Maulana Hali.



Moulana Altaf Husain Hali



ing in Panipat for about 700 years. Khwaja Malak Ali, who was distinguished in his day for his scholarship, was the name of the ancestor of Hali who migrated to India from Herat in the time of Ghiasud Din Balban, who granted the learned man a handsome living in the shape of a few fertile villages in the Panipat Pargana and appointed him as a Qazi of the place. Hali traces his descent from Khwaja Malak Ali on the father's side and is connected with a respectable Syed family on the mother's side.

The early age of Altaf Hussain was full of troubles. His mother suffered from a mild form of insanity soon after his birth and his father died when he was only nine years old.<sup>1</sup> He was thus left with none but his brothers and sisters to take care of him. As members of his family were devoted to religion, they first of all made him learn the Quran by heart, and he made a beginning in reading Persian and Arabic after that, but he never received a regular schooling. Syed Jaafar Ali was his first teacher of Persian and gave him what may be considered a fairly good grounding in that language. He learnt his Arabic from Maulvi Ibrahim Husain Ansari, who had just returned to Panipat after being educated in theology at Lucknow. Altaf Husain had not advanced very far in his studies and was barely seventeen, when he was pressed by his brother and sister to get married. He yielded to this pressure, because

---

1. In a little book called HAYAT-I-HALI, written by Syed Muhamad Faruq, it is stated that it was the father of Hali who became insane and it was the mother who died when the boy was only 9, but the correct information is the other way round, as stated above.

he respected the brother and sister as he would have respected his father and mother if they had been alive, but he did so not very willingly, as this seemed to shut him off from his studies, on which he was very keen. Finding that the parents of his wife were well off and could support her for some time, he quietly slipped away from his house and went to Delhi and studied there for about a year and half, under Maulvi Nawazish Ali, a well-known teacher and preacher of his day. The old Delhi College was in full swing at the time and some of his future contemporaries, for example Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad and Maulvi Zakaullah, were receiving education there, but he did not go to that college, as he knew that his people at Panipat were too conservative to tolerate any kind of Western education or any knowledge of the English language. Hali tells us that Moslem theologians in those days held English schools in great contempt and gave them the names of *majhalas* (places where one can remain Jahlil or ignorant.) Thus deprived of Western education, he was devoting himself entirely to Oriental learning. His studies were, however, again disturbed. His relatives came to know where he was and began to insist that he should return to his house. They succeeded in taking him back to Panipat in 1855. This was very hard on him, but he continued his studies privately there for a year or so. His relatives insisted that he should get some employment. He got a petty job in the Collector's Office at Hissar in 1856, but he had been there only one year, when the Mutiny broke out. He left Hissar for Panipat again and for a

few years had nothing to do except resuming his studies. Thus, though circumstances stood in the way of his drinking as deeply as he liked at the fountain of learning, he did not remain thirsty and may be regarded as a well-read man in Arabic and Persian.

Hali had started writing verses in Persian and Arabic while in Panipat, but this was because it was considered a kind of accomplishment in those days to be able to versify. It was not till his visit to Delhi and his contact with Ghalib that he became fully aware of his special capacity for winning distinction as a poet. During his first stay in Delhi he became acquainted with Ghalib. On the occasions of his visits to Ghalib he used to ask him to explain some of his difficult verses, both Persian and Urdu. Ghalib thus came to know that Hali had a good head for poetry and actually advised him to take to writing poetry, saying that he would be doing an injustice to his natural bent of mind if he would not do so. Hali wrote one or two *ghazals* at Delhi by virtue of this encouragement from an eminent poet like Ghalib, and though he did not get much practice at Delhi, he found a very favourable atmosphere for poetical efforts when he began to live with Nawab Mustafa Khan, Taluqadar of Jahangirabad in Bulandshahr District. Tired of the stagnant life he was leading at Panipat, for some years after the Mutiny, he was prevailed upon by Nawab Mustafa Khan to remain with him as a companion and he was with Nawab for seven or eight years. The nobleman was himself a well-known poet, who wrote under the name of

*Hasrati* in Persian and *Shefta* in Urdu. He had at first been a pupil of Momin of Delhi and had on the death of Momin begun to submit his *ghazals* to Ghalib. In the companionship of Shefta and under his genial and inspiring influence, the hitherto undisplayed talent of Hali found a sphere of activity and he began to shine with a lustre which increased as time went on. Hali began to send his poems to Ghalib along with those of Shefta, but he says that improvement in his poetry at that time was not due so much to any corrections by Ghalib as to the influence of Shefta, whose good taste endowed him with some of the characteristic features of his writings. Shefta, he says, disliked hyperbolic exaggerations and believed in making one's writings effective by true and natural descriptions of things. He tried to make simple and true facts attractive by the manner in which they were put. His ideas in this respect had a deep and lasting effect on the mind of Hali and became eventually Hali's own ideals, which he inculcated in theory and carried out in practice.

The tendency thus engendered in Hali during his stay at Jahangirabad, of writing impressively in as simple a style as possible, received a further impetus by an appointment which he got on the death of Shefta in the Punjab Government Book Depot, at Lahore, where his duties consisted in revising translations of English books into Urdu for the Education Department, with the object of improving their language. This work he did for two years and this experience proved highly useful to him in his later life. This gave him a much needed acquaintance with one of the best

literatures of the West and gave him a desire to learn as much as possible through translations. He would occasionally get hold of students who knew English and would ask them to interpret English books to him. His admiration for the simplicity and directness characterising English writings grew to such an extent that he tells us that ordinary Persian books suffered very much in his estimation. This indirect touch with English literature served as a turning point in his literary career and gave a fresh impetus to his thought. About this time an association for poetical and literary contests was formed at Lahore by Maulvi Mohammad Husain Azad at the instance of Col. Holroyd, the then Director of Public Instruction and a great patron of Urdu literature. Hali took part in those contests and some of his earliest poems, which brought him into fame as one of the originators of a new style of Urdu poetry, were written for this association. The following poems belong to this period:—*Barsat*, (Rainy Season), *Ummid*, (hope), *Rahm-o-Insaf* (Mercy and Justice), and *Hubb-i-Watan*, (Patriotism).

His time at Lahore, though usefully spent, had not been spent very happily. He was fond of Dehli, of which he had seen a good deal, when staying with Shefta, as the latter was residing there at the time. He pined for Dehli. As compared with the galaxy of literary men which could be found there in those days, he thought Lahore to be very poor in society. As a new-comer and a stranger he had no friends at Lahore. On the top of it all there was an outbreak of epidemics



during his stay here and he was himself taken ill. He wrote a few lines denouncing Lahore as a most inhospitable and miserable place. These lines are published in the *Diwan-i-Hali*, but there is a foot note, given under the lines, explaining the circumstances above referred to. I take the explanation as a sort of apology for the publication of those lines, because the poet seems to have felt afterwards that Lahore did not deserve all the unkind things said of it. The lines, however, are interesting from a literary point of view and are to the following effect :

“He who comes and lives in Lahore can realise,

That this is the world spoken of as the home of troubles,

There is so much of strangeness here,

That the nightingale does not know the rose”

Hali's desire was after all fulfilled and he got a chance of going back to Delhi, as a teacher in the Anglo-Arabic School there. He wrote one or two poems at Delhi, similar to those he had written at Lahore. Syed Ahmad Khan noticed in his style of writing a distinct departure from the old *ghazal* writers and a promise of remarkable achievements. He suggested to him the idea of writing a poem on the fallen condition of Muslims. This excellent suggestion caught the fancy of the poet and he carried out the idea with great effect in his famous *Musaddas*, called *Madd-o-Jazr-i-Islam*, which may be regarded as an epoch-making poem. It transformed people's notions as to Urdu poetry. It made the poet at

once the envy of his compeers, many of whom wrote poems in imitation of the *Musaddas* but did not succeed in coming up to its high standard of expression. It has received much praise all round, but nothing could go higher than the praise which Syed Ahmad Khan bestowed on it, when he got a printed copy of the poem from the author. Years ago I was lucky enough to get a copy of the letter written by Sir Syed, acknowledging receipt of the book and expressing his opinion on it. I think the opinion deserves to be reproduced in translation:—

“I received your letter with a copy of the *Musaddas*. From the moment I began to read the book I could not lay it down till I had finished it and when I finished it I felt sorry that it had come to an end. It will be quite appropriate to say that with this book starts a new era in our poetry. The clarity, the beauty and the flow that characterise it cannot be praised too much. It is surprising to find a subject treated with such a regard for facts and with such absence of exaggeration or far-fetched similies, which are the stock-in-trade of Urdu poesy. The book is a model of elegance and eloquence. Many of its stanzas cannot be read without one's eyes getting wet with tears. Anything that springs from the heart appeals to the heart. It is true, as you have stated in your preface, that I moved you to write this book and I regard this as a virtuous deed, so that when I die and am questioned by God as to what I have accomplished in the world, I would point to this deed and say I have done nothing except being instrumental in Hali's

writing of this book. May God bless you for this work and may it be a means of help to our community. The Imams in our mosques should recite portions of it in their congregational sermons. I thank you sincerely for your intention to grant the copyright of this book to the M. A. O. College and to have it registered, but I do not like to place any kind of restriction on its publication, as it is a mirror which reflects the true condition of our people and the elegy that mourns their downfall. It shall give me great pleasure if it is published as broadcast as possible and may become so popular that boys may sing it (to the accompaniment of *dandas*'), singing girls may sing its verses with their stringed instruments and drums, male singers may recite it with the music of their stringed instruments at the shrines of saints so as to lead persons gifted with genuine feeling to ecstasies".

The *Musaddas* was followed by a number of poems in the same style. Some of them are so good as to rank next only to the *Musaddas*, for instance the *Shikwa-i-Hind* and the *Qasida-i-Gyasia*. Tempted as I feel to give you extracts from these poems, I do not propose to do so as these poems are so well-known. Suffice it to say that after the publication of the *Musaddas* it became the recognised function of Hali to write and often to recite poems dwelling on the glorious past of Islam, and to induce modern Moslems to follow in the footsteps of their forefathers. In his elegy on the death of Hakim Mahmud Khan of Delhi,

1. *Dandas* referred to above are sticks which are used by boys for creating musical sounds by striking one stick against another.

Hali refers to this part of his work in very touching terms :—

“They say, O Hali! there was a great latitude in days gone by, in the way of poesy. When there were open paths in all directions for the poet.

Some poets dealt with stories of beauty and love,

While others adorned their verses with the colour of Sufism.

Some warmed the hearts of their friends with lyrical *ghazals*,

And others got rewards and *Khilats* (dresses) by singing eulogies of the royalty and nobility.

We, however, got little or no opportunity of indulging in song in our time.

The mournful tune of the moment did not allow us to devote attention to anything else.

Hali realised after some time that his effusions, while having the effect of awakening the Indian Musalmans were also having a somewhat harmful result by making them vain and inclined too much to look to the past, instead of working for the future. He began in his later days to remind them of their duties to the living present in eloquent terms and to lay more and more emphasis on the necessity of their trying to do something good or great. He said:

“Water your fields, while the Ganges is flowing,

Do something O young men now that the vigour of early youth is in you.

You would be worth something if you have any of the learning or skill of your ancestors,

But if you have nothing of these, then the stories of the greatness of those who are gone are nothing but stories."

He points out that the laws of the Universe are unchanging and only the fittest can survive. He asks the Moslems to become fit if they want to live and warns them that they are doomed if they do not work for their uplift:—

"Keep yourselves up if you want to be among the living people of the world, otherwise there is every indication of your going down and down. For a long time past we have been warned by the laws of nature, which govern the Universe, that nations which do nothing to get rid of their weakness are on the very brink of extinction. Crocodiles and big fish in the ocean are devouring the small fish, who are incapable of protecting themselves."

Towards the latter part of his life, Hali grew more and more philosophic in his utterances. It was an experience worth a great deal to hear Hali recite his own compositions. There was no effort at elocution, no gesticulation, no raising aloud of voice, but the beautiful verses flowed from his lips in a quiet, unassuming and impressive manner, in which every word was enunciated distinctly, every point of any significance properly emphasised, and every shade of meaning brought out in the reading. His transparent sincerity, his genuine feeling and his pure life made a deep impression on the audience and though they had to strain their ears to catch the occasional words uttered by the poet, they used to hear him spell-bound, with rapt attention.

As a specimen of his later poems, full of philosophy and thought, may be mentioned 'a *Tarkib-Band*, called the *Tuhfatul Akhwan*.

While Hali's poems on general subjects like 'Hope' and 'Mercy' were calculated to appeal to all lovers of Urdu literature, his favourite theme, about the rise and fall of Islam, was of special interest to Muhammadans only. Thus the direction which his Muse took after his coming into contact with Sir Syed, resulted perhaps in limiting his popularity mainly to Muhammadans. He was not, however, altogether oblivious of his duties to Indians in general. He wrote the *Munajat-i-Bewa*, or "the Prayer of the Widow," which has received unbounded admiration from our Hindu countrymen. No one could have advocated better the cause of the widows than Hali has done in that poem. One of his latest poems, devoted to the cause of Indian womanhood, is known as '*Chup-ki-dad*'. This was read out at the Educational Conference at Aligarh in 1903. Syed Mohammad Faruq in his *Hayat-i-Hali* states that on the occasion of the celebration of the 40th years of the succession of the late Nizam to the throne, Hali was at Hyderabad and was asked to recite a poem of his at a meeting held on the anniversary day, at which many of his admirers were present. Maharaja Kishen Pershad was in the chair. This memorable poem was recited in that meeting by Hali amidst universal applause.

Besides the poems possessing general interest for readers of all classes, Hali has written a large number of quatrains and short poems containing words of wisdom and imparting useful lessons in

telling words. The quatrains first found a place in the Diwan, but were subsequently published in the form of a separate book, which has been widely read and appreciated. They were translated into English by Mr. G. E. Ward, M. A., I. C. S. and the translation was published in England. This was, however, a translation in prose. I understand a translation in English verse is now being made by another Western scholar, Dr. Spooner of the Indian Archaeological Department. Most of you know the quatrains and I need not give you any specimens of them.

in literary circles is now tending in the direction of recognising Hali as one of the greatest benefactors of Urdu Literature. The type of critics alluded to above has been very sarcastically dealt with by Hali himself, in one of his shorter pieces, in which after mentioning some of the criticisms levelled at him by them he ends with the very telling remark that "Hali may be given a bad name on account of his home, but the writings of such opponents have given a bad name to their home itself."

Having seen something of Hali's poetry, we now come to a consideration of his work as a prose-writer. I am inclined to think that his prose writings, though far above the average, in language and style, do not come up to the standard of great masters of prose like Azad or Nazir Ahmad. His prose works are remarkable more for the matter contained in them than for the style in which they are written. Among his earlier prose works may be mentioned the translation of a book on Geology, which was published by the Punjab University, in the time of Dr Leitner. He wrote also at Lahore a book called *Majalis-un-Nisa*, which remained for a long time a text book for Girls Schools and is now unfortunately out of print. He was given a prize of Rs. 400/-, on writing this book, in a Durbar held by Lord Northbrook. The work in prose, however, which first brought Hali into prominence, was the *Hayat-i-Sadi*, which he wrote when in Delhi. The Muqaddama in prose, covering more than two hundred pages, which is attached to his Diwan, is a valuable essay on criticism and sets forth ideals of poetry as understood in various





deputation that waited on the Nizam to ask for an addition to the grant in aid of the M. A. O. College. He then felt that he had got just enough for his simple wants and he retired from service and went back to Panipat, to devote his life to literary pursuits, which continued upto his much lamented death in 1914.

## Maulvi Muhammad Husain Azad

Azad is one of the benefactors of modern Urdu literature, who have made it what it is to-day. There is hardly any name that ranks higher among the prose writers of Urdu than that of *Azad*. His life was devoted to learning and his literary work not only added materially to the stock of Urdu literature, but reformed public taste as to the quality of Urdu poetry and prose and set up a high standard of excellence for writers of Urdu. Like many of his distinguished contemporaries he belonged to Delhi, which can rightly claim credit for having produced him, but Lahore too has a right to share with Delhi the honour of owning him, as it was here that the greater part of his life was spent and almost the whole of his literary work was accomplished. He came to Lahore as an exile, but eventually adopted this place as his home, and found here a congenial atmosphere for his literary activities. He met with considerable encouragement and appreciation at the hands of some eminent Western scholars and educationists with whom he came in contact and among whom the names of Colonel Holroyd and Dr. Leitner may be specially mentioned.

The story of *Azad's* life is full of great interest and in some respects extremely pathetic. I am



Moulvi Mohammad Husain Azad



indebted to his grandson, Agha Muhammad Tahir, for a brief account of the author's family and early career. Muhammad Husain was born in Delhi about 1827 A. D. His father, Maulvi Muhammad Baqir, occupied an important position in the literary circles of Delhi in those days. Maulvi Mauhammad Baqir belonged to a family of Hamadan, in Persia, which traced its descent from *Salman Farsi*, a well-known disciple of the Prophet of Arabia. A representative of that family, Mirza Muhammad Shikoh, was the first to migrate to India. He was a great scholar of Shia theology and soon became a religious leader of the Shia community in Delhi. After him his son Maulvi Muhammad Akbar occupied the same position. Maulvi Muhammad Baqir was the only son of Maulvi Muhammad Akbar, and was educated at the Arabic Colloge at Delhi, after he had completed his studies at home. He belonged to the very first batch of men that came out of that college and among those who were educated with him was a well-known Punjab scholar, K. B. Syed Rajab Ali, of Jagraon, in Ludhiana District. Maulvi Muhammad Baqir got employment as a reader in a Court, but his father persuaded him to give up the job and to devote himself to the teaching of religion like his fore-fathers. Among the associates of Maulvi Muhammad Baqir's youth was the famous poet, *Zauq*, and this fact had a unique influence on the career of Muhammad Husain Azad. Azad thus came in contact with one of the best writers of Urdu verse, and even as a youth he went with *Zauq* to some of the great poetical contests of Delhi, where he saw other

great writers of verse and had opportunities of weighing the relative merits of *Zauq* and his contemporaries. He himself began to write *ghazals* which had the privilege of being corrected by *Zauq*. It was this practice which gave his verses the neat finish that characterised them.

Maulvi Muhammad Husain, in addition to the opportunity he thus had of writing verse, also got a very good chance of developing a taste for prose, as his father became the editor of the *Urdu Akhbar* of Delhi, which was is said to be the first Urdu newspaper started in Delhi. The newspaper did not last very long, but must have proved of considerable help in making *Azad* the great publicist he afterwards became.

*Azad's* education was partly at home and partly in the Delhi College, where he was a contemporary of Maulvi Nazir Ahmad and Maluvi Zakaullah. When these three were reading in the Delhi College, who could have known that each one of them would shine as a star on the firmament of Urdu literature? It is remarkable that Muhammad Husain, even as a youth in his teens, had an intense desire to devote himself to learning for the whole of his life. Once a distinguished European visitor came to the College and after examining the boys, put them a question as to what they would do on finishing their studies. Each answered the question according to his own inclination. When the turn of Muhammad Husain came, he said: "I shall acquire further knowledge and then spread among my countrymen whatever light I possess or receive." It need hardly be said that he lived up to this noble ideal.

The smooth course of *Azad's* life was suddenly interrupted by the Mutiny of 1857 A. D. Maulvi Muhammad Baqir had given shelter to Mr. Taylor, Principal, Delhi College, when the mutineers were going for every European whom they could get hold of. Mr. Taylor was concealed in a room inside the *Imambara*. The mutineers came to know of it and surrounded the place. The Maulvi managed to take Mr. Taylor out of his hiding place and was taking him to a mosque for shelter. When Mr. Taylor felt that all would be soon over with him, he handed over to the Maulvi a bundle of currency notes on the back of one of which he wrote something in Latin. He told the Maulvi that if the English succeed in getting back Delhi, the currency notes should be made over to the first Englishman whom he might come across. Mr. Taylor was taken to the mosque by the Maulvi, but this was found out by the mutineers the next day, who caught him and killed him. When the Mutiny was over and the British re-entered Delhi, Maulvi Muhammad Baqir, true to his trust, made over the currency notes left with him by Mr. Taylor to a Colonel, little knowing that he had been holding in trust his own death warrant and was delivering it himself. What Mr. Taylor had written in Latin on one of the notes was that Maulvi Muhammad Baqir had at first given him shelter for some time, but had eventually failed him and had not tried to save him. The Maulvi was, therefore, suspected of having been identified with the mutineers and was ordered to be shot dead and his property confiscated. This rendered *Azad* homeless. He left Delhi with the women



and children of the family and the only thing that he managed to save from the general ruin that suddenly over-took the family, was a bundle of manuscript poems of his great master *Zauq*, which were subsequently published by him in his enlarged edition of *Diwan-i-Zauq*, with a suitable preface.

*Azad* and his people took shelter at Sonapat with an old employee of theirs, who had served in their press at Delhi, but as he learnt that he might also be arrested as the son of Maulvi Mauhammad Baqir, he left Sonapat, disguised as a faqir, while his family remained at Sonapat. He came to Jagraon and met his father's old friend, Syed Rajab Ali. The Syed treated him very kindly and sent for his family from Sonapat. After some time Syed Rajab Ali started a press at Ludhiana, where *Azad* began to work as a calligraphist. After a short time *Azad* visited Lucknow in 1858 A. D. and made the acquaintance of the literary men there. He came back to Punjab and temporarily got employment in Jind State. He did not, however, find employment in the State congenial to him and came to Lahore, where a cousin of his was employed as a Postmaster. Through him he first got a job in the Post Office and, after a few years, he got into the Education Department, where he made a humble start, but his talent was soon recognised and gradually he rose to the position of a Professor in the Government College and got the title of *Shams-ul-Ulema*, in recognition of his literary work.

His connection with the department of Public Instruction in the Punjab gave him the opportunity of accomplishing what Nature had fitted him for.

His earliest productions were some text-books in Urdu, for use in schools, and among these his *Qisas-i-Hind* is entitled to a high rank. Some of the most important episodes in Indian history are described in this book in the form of short and attractive stories. The language used is simple and the style beautiful. Another historical work of his which is worthy of great praise is the *Darbar-i-Akbari*. It deals with the period of Akbar and tells us all about the galaxy of remarkable men who gathered round Akbar's throne and made his reign one of the most famous in history. *Azad* was long engaged in collecting materials for this work and unfortunately could not bring it out himself. The first edition of the book was brought out by the enterprise of one of the best-known of *Azad's* old pupils, Maulvi Syed Mumtaz Ali. The most remarkable book, however, in the writings of *Azad* is his *Ab-i-Hayat*, which is a history of Urdu poetry from the time of the earliest poets like *Wali*, to the time of *Zauq* and *Ghalib*. This book is admitted on all hands to be the best of its kind in Urdu literature. There were some *tazkiras* written before, but they give very little account of the lives of the poets and little or no criticism. They only give specimens of the poems of each writer. The *Ab-i-Hayat* was a distinct improvement on them and gave in the form of an interesting and readable narrative the story of Urdu poetry. Considering the meagreness of the material, which was available, this achievement of *Azad* is entitled to great admiration and must have cost him any amount of labour when he was collecting information from various sources. It has been said by

some critics that inaccuracies have crept in here and there in certain details and that at places the author has even drawn on his imagination a good deal. That may be true, but taking the work as a whole, we cannot be sufficiently grateful to *Azad* for the pains he took in producing this book. It is necessary that some one should now supplement this book by adding an account of the period after *Ghalib*, and bring the history of literature up-to-date, including in it not only accounts of later poets but also of eminent prose-writers.<sup>1</sup>

Another Urdu book of *Azad* which may be mentioned is the *Sukhandan-i-Faras*, in which he traces the development of the Persian language and literature. It is really a collection of lectures dealing with the subject and is a compilation, which can be very helpful to students of Persian literature. Among the imaginative writings of *Azad* the book that deserves the foremost mention is his *Nairang-i-Khayal*, which is so well-known and so widely appreciated that I need not say much about it, except recommending it for perusal to those who have not already read this beautiful allegory.

Having referred to some of *Azad's* famous prose works let us turn to his poems. I need hardly say that his published poems occupy only a small volume and that his fame as a great writer

---

<sup>1</sup> Two later works which deal with modern Urdu poetry are (1) *Shir-ul-Hind* (Vol. 1 and 11) by Maulana Abdus Salam Nadvi and *Gul-e-Rana* by Maulana Hakim Abdul Haye—both issued by the Maarif Press, Azamgarh, U. P. A work dealing with Urdu prose literature is by Maulvi Mauhammad Yehya Tanha, Pleader, Ghaziabad, U. P. It is called *Siar-ul-Musanifin*. (Ed. H. R.). Tanha is also going to publish a book on the poets of Urdu.

depends mainly on his prose writings. I must add, however, that he was by nature a true poet. His heart was full of poetical ideas and if he had chosen to shine as a great poet, he had the distinction within his grasp. I think there must have been a time in his life when he made the choice for himself to specialise in prose. His far-seeing eye must have perceived that what the Urdu language and literature needed most was good prose and he devoted himself to it heart and soul. He wrote poetry in prose. There are passages in his prose in which it is just as difficult as it is in good verse to substitute one word for another or to change the order in which words are placed. Words flow from his pen which are not only full of poetical rhythm but the ideas clothed in them are also poetic. This is not all. Feeling, which is the essence of poetry, characterises his prose writings. If he is talking of old poets he seems to be living with them, feeling for them and sharing their joys and griefs, their failures and successes. Such being the characteristics of his prose, his poetry could not be without them. *Nazm-i-Azad*, the collection of his published poems, is well-worth reading. These poems, along with the poems of *Hali*, written before the famous *Mussaddas* of the latter, mark a definite stage in the progress of Urdu literature. It is interesting to note that both these reformers of Urdu poetry worked in the Education Department in the Punjab and thus co-operated in bringing about this reform. They advocated that old ideals and forms of poetry must change and they themselves led the way. In 1874 a literary society was founded in Lahore, at the first meeting of which a lect

delivered by *Azad* in which he appealed to his countrymen to tap the stores of English to enrich their own literature. He said:—

“The gems that can now adorn your literature are locked in English boxes, which are placed close to us but we are unaware of their existence. Our countrymen who have acquired a knowledge of the English language, have got the keys of those boxes and I appeal to them to help us in securing the gems. I ask them whether they have realised or not that the heritage of their ancestors is about to disappear. Have they no sympathy with that heritage and will allow it to decay?”

He described his ideal of “eloquence,” in the following words in the same lecture: “Eloquence does not consist in flights of imagination and exaggeration, nor in the beauty of rhymes and metaphors, nor in high sounding words and expressions. Its true test is this: If we have in our mind a feeling of pleasure or grief, of a liking or dislike for something or of fear or anger, our description of it should convey to the hearer the same feeling or the same impression which he would have received if it had been his own observation or experience.” To illustrate what he advocated, *Azad* wrote a *Masnavi*, giving a graphic description of the time of night when the whole world goes to sleep. This *Masnavi* was recited after the lecture and was much appreciated. Another *Masnavi*, which he wrote later, is known as the *Subh-i-Ummid* (The Morning of Hope). The author shows how hope is the one source of inspiration and encouragement in all walks of life. The *Masnavi Hub-i-Watan*, dealing with the love of one’s own country and the

*Kkwab-i-Aman* or the 'Dream of Peace' are equally remarkable poems. A few *Ghazals* of *Azad* which have been printed along with his longer poems show that he could have been a great *Ghazal* writer if he wished.

There is one phase of *Azad's* life to which no reference has been made yet. He was a great traveller. He once went to Central Asia with Dr. Leitner, who was deputed on a political mission. Dr. Leitner disguised himself as a Mulla, a role which he could easily fulfil on account of his Oriental learning. *Azad* and one or two other Indian scholars went about with him as his assistants. *Azad* gathered a lot of valuable experience in his travels and on his return wrote about them and also published some text-books of Persian. It was during these travels that he had a unique experience which, in the light of subsequent events, would be of great interest to students of psychology as a remarkable phenomenon of the working of the human mind. He was sojourning in Bokhara, dressed as a *Qalandar* (*Darvish*), with a tall cap on his head. He went to a baker's shop to have his food and had just started taking his meal, when his eye fell on a poor lean man who was sitting there. He was so lean that there was hardly any flesh left on his bones. He asked him his name. The man replied that his name was Muhammad Husain. He asked him to what place he belonged. The reply was "Delhi." He asked him the name of his father. The reply was "Muhammad Baqir." *Azad* was so startled by this that he could not take any more food and ran away from the place and left Bokhara at once. This incident he related, on his

return, to the members of his family and it has been narrated to me by his grandson, Agha Muhammad Tahir. Strange as this incident is, it explains to some extent *Azad's* mental derangement, which followed a long time after. It is a permanent source of regret to the admirers of *Azad* and his work that the world was deprived of the benefit of his literary activity for about twenty years before his death. Those who knew *Azad*, with his enchanting powers of conversation and his love of wit and humour, were shocked to find him silent yet alive. Even after this forced retirement from life, he was a familiar figure in Lahore, constantly walking, according to his old habit, in the gardens round the city, speaking to no one and appearing as if something was absorbing his thoughts. In those days the peculiar hallucination, under which he was working, was that some enemy had so arranged things that a person bearing the name of Muhammad Husain was going about as a man with a deranged brain and giving him a bad name. When he talked to old pupils or relatives in those days he used to try to disillusion them on the subject and to assure them that he was all right. It is noteworthy that he continued reading and writing even in that state of mind. The books mostly read by him at the time were those on religious philosophy and his writings in those days were of a more or less coherent character. A little book called the *Sapak Namak* represents the effusions of this period. The two words which make up the name of the book are probably coined by the writer, who purports to found some new religion, the revelations of which are contained in that little volume. It is painful

to refer to this dark period of *Azad's* life and I am glad to go back to a brighter period.

I have already said that he was a well-travelled man. The visit he paid to Central Asia with Dr. Leitner was about 1867 A. D. That, however, was in the course of duty and at the expense of Government and is not so note-worthy as his visit to Persia in 1885, the expenses of which he bore himself, spending about ten thousand rupees of his own hard earned money. It was one of the ambitions of his life to have a great manuscript library for research work. He had been collecting some books here and one of the objects with which he went to Persia was to collect some manuscripts there. He succeeded in bringing some valuable books from Persia and was going to present his whole collection to the public by founding a library, when the illness referred to above intervened. It is fortunate that a good part of *Azad's* collection is now preserved in the Punjab University Library and is not lost to the world. *Azad* was keeping a diary during his visit to Persia, out of which it was his idea to produce a book of travels. It can well be imagined, how interesting that book would have been if he had been able to write it. That intention remained unfulfilled but luckily his notes have been found by Agha Muhammad Tahir, who has published them in an interesting little volume, called *Sair-i-Iran*. This is one of the several posthumous publications that have been brought out by his grandson, whose efforts in this direction deserve appreciation.

*Azad's* letters also make interesting reading.



The first collection of his letters called *Maktubat-i-Azad* was published by me some years ago, but it is now out of print. I am glad that Agha Mohammad Tahir has brought out an enlarged edition of the letters under the same name. They are readable from a literary point of view, as well as because they throw some light on the events of his life.

*Azad* died at Lahore in 1910, after more than twenty years of the unfortunate malady, which cut short his eminently useful literary career.





Moulvi Zaka Ullah

## Maulvi Zaka Ullah

Among the literary men who have contributed during the second half of the 19th century to the advancement of Urdu literature, the late-Maulvi Mohammad Zaka Ullah must occupy a high rank. It cannot be said that he was distinguished for great originality or was particularly remarkable for the beauty of his style, but his contribution to the stock of Urdu literature was none the less valuable. His works consisted mainly of translations and adaptations from English books on a variety of subjects. He began by writing text books for schools, on Physical Science, Economics, Geography and History, all of which were liked when they appeared and served a useful purpose. The work, however, by which he will be chiefly remembered was *Tarikh-i-Hindustan*, a history of India in 14 volumes, which is the most exhaustive compilation on the history of India in the Urdu language and may be regarded as his *magnum opus*. He has taken great pains over this book, which is the result of vast study and research, the learned author having tapped all valuable sources of information, English as well as Indian. His work illustrates the debt which Urdu literature owes to English, so far as the present

stage of its development is concerned. Maulvi Zaka Ullah wrote nothing but prose, and even in prose he always aimed at simplicity of style and never went in for flights of imagination or artificial means of producing effect.

For the brief biographical sketch of the life of Maulvi Zaka Ullah, which is given below, I am indebted to my esteemed friend Maulvi Mohd Inayat Ullah,<sup>1</sup> the eldest son of the author, who is himself a well-known literary man. M. Zaka Ullah sprang from a respectable and scholarly family which traced its origin to Ghazni in Afghanistan. His ancestors came from Ghazni to the Punjab and after living in Lahore for some time, his great grandfather went to Delhi and settled there, in the time of Shah Alam. He was appointed a tutor to one of the Mughal Princes and this position the descendants of the first tutor occupied after him, so that the father of Maulvi Zaka Ullah was employed in that capacity upto 1857. Born in 1832, Zaka Ullah, in his childhood, commenced his studies with his grandfather Hafiz Mohammad Baka Ullah. He showed signs of intelligence from his infancy and began to read the Gulistan of Saadi when he was only six years old. It is related that during his childhood his mother complained to his grandfather one day that he had been a very naughty boy and had broken some utensils. She suggested that he should be punished. The grandfather smiled and said he would not punish

---

1. M. Mohammad Inayat Ullah was alive when this lecture was delivered. His untimely death has deprived Urdu literature of one of its best authors.

him that day, even if he had set fire to the house, because he was pleased very much with the way in which Zaka Ullah had got up his lesson.

A College had been established at Delhi in those days. Zaka Ullah joined the Oriental branch of that institution. He had not been there many months before he won a scholarship and also a prize in the form of some books and a few rupees. He was quite a little boy at the time and was so pleased with his prize that he ran breathless from his school to his house, and presented what he had got to his mother, who was very much delighted with the success of her child, as in sending him to school she had been mainly instrumental. As a student he showed special aptitude for Mathematics and was a favourite pupil of the late. Mr. Ram Chandra, who was a distinguished mathematical teacher. This taste for mathematics Maulvi Zaka Ullah retained throughout his life. He translated in Urdu well-known text books on Arithmetic, Algebra and Euclid, and thereby rendered great service to the cause of education through the medium of the vernacular. His inclination towards mathematics also indicated, what proved afterwards a characteristic feature of Maulvi Mohammad Zaka Ullah's life, namely, his practical and matter of fact genius, which led him to have a distinct liking for prose. He passed his High Proficiency examination when he was 16 or 17 and got two silver medals and was soon afterwards appointed a teacher in the institution where he had been educated. The first

book that he wrote was on Indian games, such as cards, chess, etc. It was published before the Mutiny and was liked very much by Englishmen, as it gave them an opportunity of knowing how those games, which were familiar to them as well, were played in India. His next publication was a little book on Arithmetic, which was sold out in three days in Delhi, and was the talk of the town when it appeared, as people thought it was remarkable that a youth still in his teens should write such a book. This publication brought him a profit of Rs. 32/- which sum he presented to his sister in the shape of an article of jewellery which he purchased with it. The small beginning thus made by him as a writer and a compiler of books proved so encouraging and his desire to serve his country by means of his writing was so intense, that it is estimated that he wrote about seventy thousand pages of printed matter, which appeared in about hundred volumes. This estimate covers only such of his writings as were published in book form. Besides these, I understand, he contributed about 10,000 pages to numerous newspapers, magazines and periodicals, for which he wrote from time to time. I am informed that there were several thousand pages of manuscript still lying in his boxes, when he departed from this world.

Having started in service as a teacher at Delhi, Maulvi Zaka Ullah continued to serve in the Education Department till he was 55. He was transferred from Delhi, to Agra, was re-transferred to Delhi, and was for some time the

Headmaster of the Normal School and afterwards a Deputy Inspector of Schools. He was then transferred to the Muir College, Allahabad, to teach Western science through the medium of Urdu, as at that time there was an idea of having an Oriental Department in connection with that College, but that scheme fell through and the Maulvi had to work there as a Professor of Arabic and Persian. It was in 1872 that he went to Allahabad and served there till 1887, when he retired on pension. Shortly before his retirement, he was granted the title of Khan Bahadur and Shams-ul-Ulama, both in one year. After his retirement he spent sometime at Ali-garh, in the company of his friend Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and then came to Delhi and settled down there for a fresh period of literary activity. In fact the more valuable part of his work was done after his retirement. He lived for 23 years after giving up service, and the whole of that period, barring the last one year or so of his life, when he suffered from a protracted illness, was devoted to useful literary pursuits. He was not a very strong man physically, but he appears to have regulated his life so well and was a man of such abstemious habits that he always kept good health till he broke down right at the end, which was due to natural exhaustion after the tremendous amount of work done by him. It is worth mentioning that during his 37 years of service he never took leave except for 16 days in all. It is said that during his last illness he used to remark that as he had no illness for the greater part of his life he was



having a long illness at the end. It was the opinion of doctors that there was nothing wrong, even then, with his vital organs, but the real trouble was a decline of strength owing to natural decay. He died at the ripe age of 78, on the 7th November 1910, at Delhi, and his loss was mourned by all true lovers of learning and by his numerous admirers in Delhi and in other parts of India.

Maulvi Mohammad Zaka Ullah had so charming a personality that those who knew him and came in contact with him became very fond of him. I had the privilege of coming into a fairly intimate touch with him in 1907 and 1908, which years I spent at Delhi. He was extremely unassuming and obliging. Whenever I made a request to him for some contribution to the Urdu magazine I was then publishing, he never said 'No'. He was a great friend of learning and believed in the propagation of knowledge in every possible way. He took a deep and lively interest in all literary efforts. There was a great friendship between him and Maulvi Nazir Ahmad and other scholarly men of his day. There was a literary society, which was founded by a number of men who had received their education in the old Delhi College, and that society was kept up by them till the cruel hand of death took them all away, one by one, from our midst. The late Rai Bahadur Peare Lal, the late Maulvi Nazir Ahmad and Maulvi Mohammad Zaka Ullah were prominent members of that society. The society was not very formal or regular, but these distinguished men used to meet very frequently

in rooms in the upper storey of the Delhi Institute and to discuss literary and scientific matters, thus deriving inspiration from one another for the work to which they devoted their lives.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the life of Maulvi Zaka Ullah was the great love and reverence he had for his mother. When he got an offer for an appointment at Allahabad he received a simultaneous offer for service at Lahore. He himself liked to go to Lahore, but his mother advised him to go to Allahabad, and he decided to do as she desired, at the sacrifice of his personal inclination. It seems she was a lady of a very strong character and was regular and methodical in her habits. This appears to have kept an abiding impression on her son and to have contributed, in no small degree, to the son's success in life. She used to get up at about 3-30 a.m., to offer her *tahajjud*<sup>1</sup> prayers, which were followed by the morning prayers, after which her daily routine of house hold life started. She used to have a nap for half an hour between 8-30 and 9 a.m., after finishing the important part of her morning's work, but she seldom slept during the rest of the day. She made a point of doing some spinning every day and kept a strict discipline in the house, so that no one in the household dared disobey her. Even her husband showed great deference to her wishes. Maulvi Zaka Ullah used to say

---

1. This is a prayer which is not included in the five obligatory prayers prescribed for Muslims. It is a matter of option, but its merit is believed to be great. The time for it is between 3 and 4 in the morning.

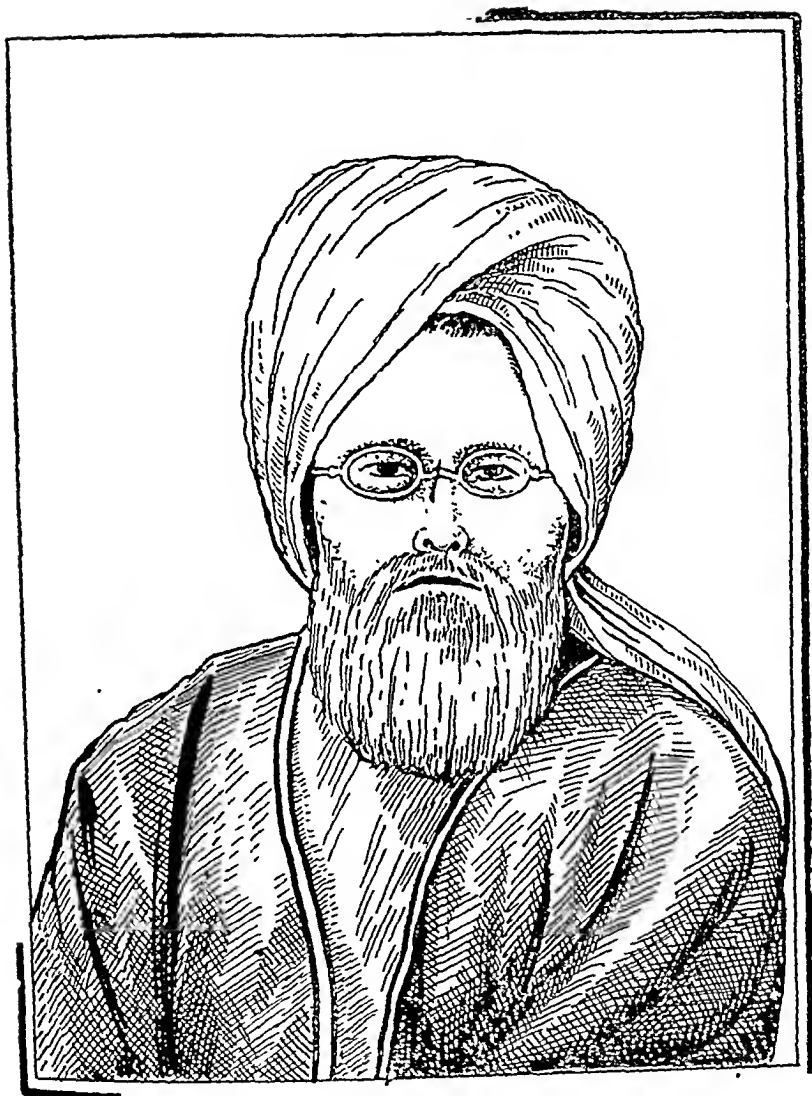
that he owed to his mother's regular habits his regularity and the methodical nature of his work. Though a devoutly religious man in his own way, he was absolutely free from racial and religious prejudice. He had as good friends among Hindus and Christians as among Muslims. All classes of his friends liked him equally. He was a strong supporter of the educational movement started by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan at Aligarh and was a prominent member of his party, yet he had some very intimate friends among those who opposed the Aligarh movement. He always took a great interest in students. A student never approached him in vain for help or assistance. If any one asked him to throw some light on any question or problem, he was quite willing to give freely of the knowledge he possessed. If a student asked him for any kind of help for pursuing his studies, he was ready to render assistance. The morning time was usually the time devoted by him to his literary work, and he did not like to receive visitors at that time, but for student visitors even that time was not held to be sacred. If it was announced to him that a student wanted to see him for some purpose, he used to spare a few minutes to give him an interview.

Maulvi Zaka Ullah was a great believer in thrift and economy and adopted these as the guiding principles of his life. Whenever he saw young men or students, he was never tired of preaching to them to adopt simplicity of life as their aim and to live as frugally as possible. In his dress and manner of living he was old fashion-

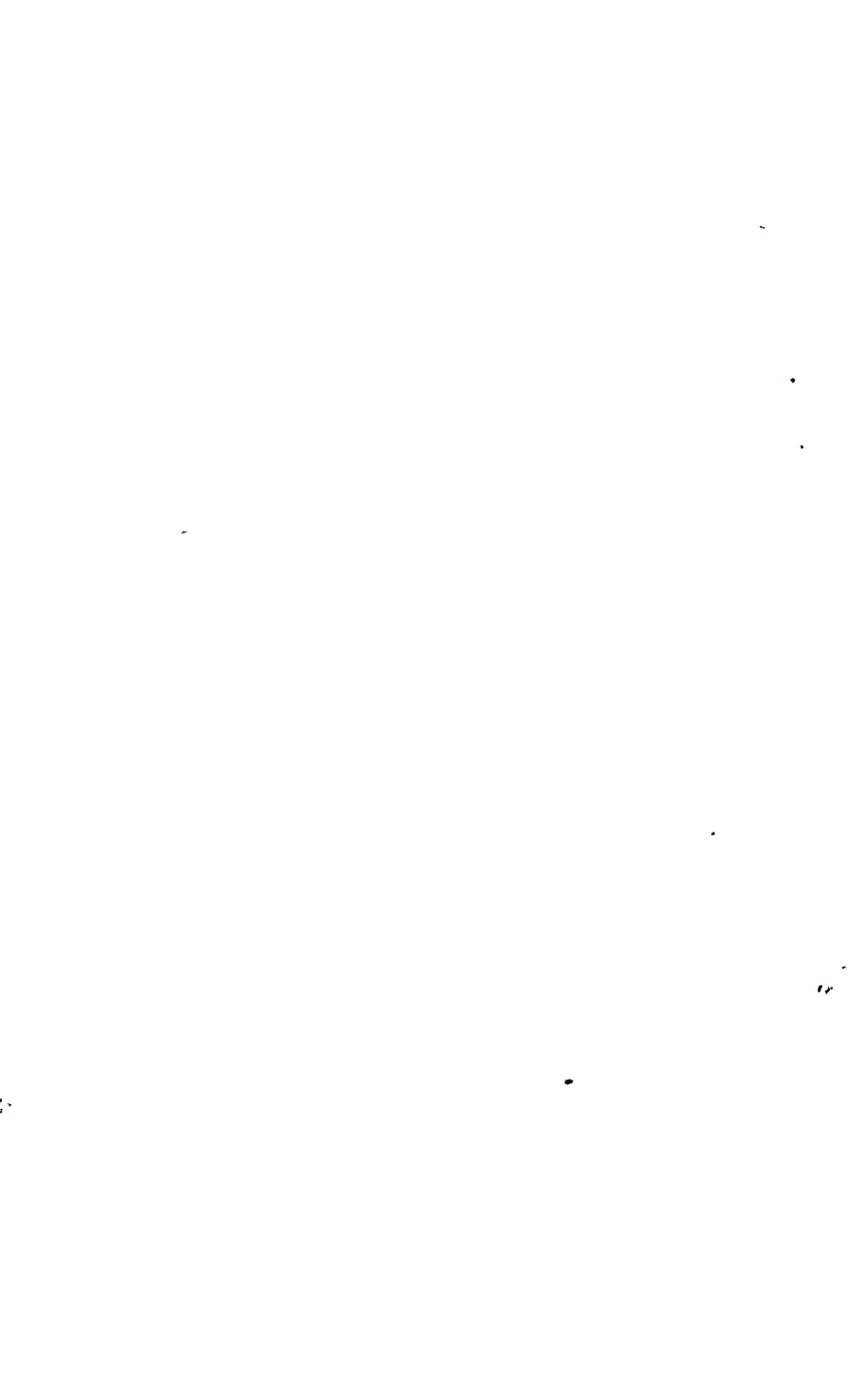
ed and he stuck to that style, but he was quite progressive in his ideas. His desire for learning was so intense that he was eager to learn from every possible source, and if on any particular day he did not learn anything new, he used to remark that that day of his life was wasted. His conversation was never personal and was mostly on literary subjects. He had a genuine respect for every body who could accomplish something in any department of life, so that it was not only learned men to whom he was ready to show respect, but every one who had distinguished himself in any art or craft, or had won name as an administrator or had succeeded in life by acquiring wealth by legitimate means, got from him his due share of respect. So far as his own work is concerned he never cared for praise. The kind of work he had chosen was such as would not ordinarily elicit great praise from the press or the public, but it was fortunate for him that he was indifferent to praise. He believed in doing literary work for its own sake, and went on writing because his nature prompted him to do so. He felt it was by means of writing that he could place knowledge within reach of those, who would not have otherwise obtained it. Throughout his life he performed his great task as if he was an untiring labourer in the field of letters, possessed of a giant's strength, so that he has beaten the record among his contemporaries in the volume of his work, though as a purely literary performance, his books cannot claim the more polished style of men like Maulvi Nazir Ahmad and Maulvi Mohammad Husain Azad.

## Maulana Shibli Nuamani

In a literature more advanced than Urdu, it is doubtful if the works of Maulana Shibli would have come in for a very prominent mention in taking stock of its purely literary productions, though they might have ranked high in the biographical and historical section of that literature. As Urdu is still in the process of growth, the efforts of those, who have contributed to the building up of the edifice of its literature, must be judged by a standard different to that applicable to the literatures of some older and richer languages, and from this point of view, Shibli must take his place among the foremost masters of Urdu literature. He belonged to Azamgarh, and, by birth and domicile, was not connected with either of the two great centres of Urdu, namely Delhi or Lucknow. Nor can it be said, strictly speaking, that he belonged to any of the two great schools of Urdu writing associated with Delhi and Lucknow. At different periods of his life he came in touch with both the schools and probably imbibed what was good in each. As a student he profited by the able guidance of Maulvi Faizul Hasan, one of the most famous and successful teachers of his day, who could count a large number of distinguished men among his pupils. Maulvi Faizul Hasan belonged to



Moulana Shibli Nuamani



Saharanpur and was connected for a considerable period with the Punjab University. So far as Urdu is concerned, Maulvi Faizul Hasan may be regarded as one connected with the Delhi School. Shibli's earliest literary associations may therefore be taken to be with Delhi. Another and a more direct contact with the Delhi School began when Shibli attracted the notice of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and was appointed a Professor in the M. A. O. College at Aligarh. This brought him under the charm of the strong personality of the old Syed and gave him numerous opportunities of a close touch with the great writers of Delhi. I think it is mainly due to these associations that one finds more of the Delhi style in his writings than that of Lucknow. Towards the end of his career he got into intimate touch with Lucknow and this added some of the elegance and polish of Lucknow to his style.

Maulvi Shibli had a varied career, the details of which, though very interesting, will be out of place in a sketch dealing mainly with his literary activity. He was a man of great ability and perseverance and his work was many-sided. He was chiefly known as a great teacher, who could inspire his pupils with great ideas and ideals and who has actually made some of the leading men of the present generation of educated Moslems what they are. He was at first a prominent helper and supporter of the educational movement of Sir Syed and contributed substantially to the success of the Educational Conference founded by the latter. After serving the Aligarh College for many years, he left



feel that in educating Moslems greater emphasis on a knowledge of Arabic was needed to make them conversant with their religion. He became interested, therefore, in the *Nadwat-ul-Ulema* movement, and soon rose to be one of its leaders. This movement aimed at the advancement of Moslems through their education on the Oriental side being directed to the teaching of religion and by teaching them English as a secondary language. He also spent many years at Hyderabad, Daccan, in the educational and literary departments of the Nizam's dominions, and did very useful work there. He returned from Hyderabad to Lucknow with a pension from the Nizam's Government to continue his favourite literary pursuits. During the last year of his life he developed an interest in politics and wrote many political poems. He was also engaged at this time on his *Magnum Opus*, the *Sirati-Nabi* or the Life of the Prophet, the writing of which he had long contemplated, but which he was eventually enabled to undertake on account of the munificent pecuniary help given by the late Begum of Bhopal.

Shibli started life at a time when Persian scholarship counted far much more among Moslems than a knowledge of Urdu. Having a natural bent for poetry, he began to write Persian poems and continued doing so all his life. His Persian poems deserve to be classed among the best productions of Indian writers of Persian and are possessed of great beauty. Four collections of them have been printed and are known as *Diwan-i-Shibli*, *Dasta-i-Gul*, *Bue Gul* and

Bargi-Gul. If Shibli's attention had been directed to Urdu from the very outset and if he had written Urdu verse instead of Persian from his youth onwards, he would have probably achieved remarkable success in Urdu poetry, but barring a few Urdu poems like the Masnavi Subh-i-Umed he did not discover till late in life that he could do well in Urdu verses. His work as a writer of Urdu, therefore, began with prose. He wrote the biographies of many heroes of Islam. As a scholar he was fond of research and his reading of Islamic History was very wide. With his knowledge of Arabic and Persian he had an easy access to original sources of history. His contact with a European scholar like Professor T. W. Arnold, (afterwards Sir Thomas Arnold), added to his own fondness for historical research. The two great scholars, as colleagues on the staff of the Aligarh College, became fast friends and each influenced the other to a remarkable degree. Mr. Arnold started studying Arabic, Persian and Urdu, while Maulvi Shibli began to learn French. and acquired a fair knowledge of it. Though he could not talk French, yet he could read books in that language and began to devour the works of French scholars on Oriental subjects. He also travelled abroad and visited Egypt and Turkey, thus broadening his outlook. He gave the impressions of his travels in a book called the *Safar Namai Rum*, which is very interesting and is one of the best books of travels written in Urdu. Having felt that well-written books on the lives of the heroes of Islam were very much needed and that there was immense scope for research in this

direction, Shibli started the compilation of a series of biographies of some of the greatest men of the Islamic world. His choice first fell on Hazrat Umar, the second Caliph of the Prophet of Arabia. Caliph Umar was a just and a powerful administrator, a great general and conqueror, and with all this an exceptionally unassuming and God-fearing man. Shibli gave an account of the life and work of the great Caliph in his well-known book *Al-Farooq*, which at once brought him into prominence, not only as a research scholar, but as a writer of good Urdu. This work was patronised by His Highness the late Mir Mahbub Ali Khan, father of His Exalted Highness the present Nizam of Hyderabad. The book was very much appreciated by the Urdu reading public and had a wide circulation. It was followed by several other biographical works, such as (1) *Al-Mamun*, (2) *Al-Ghazzali* and *Siratul Nuaman*. The first named book described the life of the famous Abbaside Caliph, Mamun, of Baghdad, who was a great patron of learning. The second book contained a history of the career of the great philosopher and theologian of Baghdad, known in Europe as Al-Gazelle. *Siratul Nuaman* was the biography of Imam Abu Hanifa, the renowned Muslim jurist and founder of the Hanafi sect of Sunni Moslems. The two latter works, dealing as they do with the lives of two men of learning, abound in Arabic quotations and are not written in the easy style of *Al-Farooq* and *Al-Mamun*.

Maulna Shibli has enriched the stock of Urdu literature by another readable biography, *Sawanih*

*Maulana Rumi*, which describes the life of Maulana Jalalud Din Rumi, one of the great Sufis of Islam. Among smaller works of this type may be mentioned the *Bayan-i-Khisrau*, which gives a brief account of the life of Amir Khisrau of Delhi, whose poetry is so popular among the Sufis upto this day.

The books mentioned above are all valuable in their own way and would have sufficed to make Shibli memorable as a writer, but he aimed at something higher and more scholarly than these earlier publications. He conceived the idea of writing in Urdu a complete account of the life of the great founder of Islam. For this purpose he began an extensive study of this vast subject and engaged a considerable staff of young scholars to collect material for this huge work. He divided the work into four parts. He laid down the lines on which the research was to proceed, and appointed several scholars to do research work under his supervision. He also took notes of the main criticisms levelled at the Prophet by European critics and proceeded to reply to them or to explain the misunderstandings under which the critics had been labouring. He pointed out that the European critics depended on some books of doubtful authenticity instead of going to the most accredited and authentic sources of information and that they had thus taken an incorrect view on many matters. This work involved so much expense that Shibli found his own limited resources too inadequate for the completion of this task. His desire to serve the cause of learning and to enrich Urdu

literature, was so keen that he had always been spending all his earnings on his literary pursuits, purchasing rare books available in India, sending for books from Egypt or Persia and paying people to help him in his compilations. When he published his books he did not spare any expense in making them attractive and did not mind whether from a pecuniary point of view he lost or gained by his publications. Her Highness the Begum of Bhopal,<sup>1</sup> who is a great patron of learning, came to know of the intention of Maulvi Shibli to publish the *Sirat-i-Nabi* and undertook to provide the expense. With this royal help this work was taken up by Maulana Shibli in right earnest and it took several years. Shibli had just completed the writing of the first volume, consisting of an account of the Prophet's life and had approved of the other volumes compiled under his direction, when his career of immense usefulness was cut off and his earthly labours came to an end. The first volume of the *Sirat-i-Nabi* was, therefore, published after his death and one of his favourite pupils and collaborators in this compilation, Maulvi Syed Suleman Nadvi, saw it through the Press. This was followed by the volumes subsequently published. This work has met with a very favourable reception. It was not meant to be of a merely popular nature and therefore in some quarters its serious and scholarly tone was felt to be disappointing,

---

1. The late Begum of blessed memory was alive when this lecture was written. She is no longer with us, but her distinguished son, His Highness the ruler of Bhopal, is worthily keeping up the traditions of his mother.

while in other circles where seriousness was appreciated, the occurrence of passages of purely literary and artistic merit was not valued sufficiently, but the more reasonable critics are of the opinion that Maulana Shibli has placed the Urdu-knowing world under a deep debt of gratitude by this great work.

Another epoch-making work of Maulana Shibli, which deserves special notice is the *Shiar-ul-Ajam*, which is a history of Persian literature in Urdu, in four volumes. The first volume of this book appeared in 1909 and was printed at the Faiz-i-Am Press, Aligarh. It dealt with Persian poets from Abbas Maruzi to Nizami and included an account of Firdausi, the famous author of the *Shahnama*. The remaining volumes were published in due course and received very appreciative reviews from the Press. The *Shiar-ul-Ajam* attracted the notice of the Punjab University and Maulana Shibli was awarded a sum of Rs. 1500/- by the University, as this work was considered to be the best book of the year in an Indian language. The valuable book of Professor Brown in English, on the history of Persian literature, had appeared before the book of Maulana Shibli. While appreciating the erudition and research of Professor Brown, Maulana Shibli differs from him in his estimate of some famous writers of Persian and adversely criticises parts of his book. Perhaps Shibli was a little too conscious of his own knowledge and information and was, therefore, more emphatic in expressing his differences with Professor Brown than he should have been. This was

taken exception to by a younger Indian scholar Professor Mahmud Khan Sherani<sup>1</sup> who championed the cause of Professor Brown, in a well-written article in the *Quarterly Review*, called *Urdu*. He adversely criticised the *Shiar-ul-Ajam* and tried to establish that Shibli's research was defective, particularly with regard to Firdausi, and that Professor Brown's conclusions rested on a sounder footing than those of Shibli. This is not the place to discuss the relative merits of the works of Professor Brown and Shibli, but what appeals to me in the *Shiar-ul-Ajam* is that an Indian scholar should produce in Urdu a critical work of this kind, which can hold its own in comparison with similar works of European scholars. I have it on good authority that an eminent European scholar, on seeing Shibli's book, observed that before he saw that book he could scarcely believe that any one, not having the advantages which the great centres of learning in Europe offer for research; could write such a book, sitting in India. It is precisely from this point of view that I regard the *Shiar-ul-Ajam* as a remarkable book in spite of any faults that Professor Sherani has found with it, as to the opinions embodied in it. I think it is a valuable addition to the stock of Urdu literature and has paved the way for other books of the same kind, especially for an up to date history of Urdu literature.

---

1. Alas Professor Sherani has now passed away. He was serving in the Islamia College, Lahore, when he wrote the article. He subsequently went to the Oriental College, Lahore, from where he retired some years ago. He belonged to Tonk State and died more than a year ago in his native home.

Among the lines of research taken up by Maulana Shibli was the tracing of the history of the development of what is known as *Ilm ul Kalam*, the object of which was to find rationalistic explanations of religion in order to satisfy sceptics and doubters within, and, hostile critics outside the pale, of Islam. He has written a very instructive book in Urdu, under the above name, which was very much appreciated when it appeared and has been reprinted since. There is a collection of his shorter essays in Urdu, published as a *Rasail-i-Shibli*. Most of these short essays had been published separately from time to time, and have been collected subsequently. It is not necessary to mention all these essays, but two out of them deserve special notice. One was a pamphlet of some 76 pages on the old Library in Alexandria. Shibli tried to refute the theory that the old library was burnt by the Moslem conquerors of Egypt. He referred to English, French and German authorities in support of his contention and showed that a great misconception had prevailed on this subject. This pamphlet was published in 1902 at the Mufid-i-Am Press, Agra, and has since been reprinted several times. The other essay dealt with the period of the Emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir and tried to show, by reference to historical works of recognised authority, that much of what was written against Aurangzeb, especially with regard to his attitude towards his Hindu subjects, was not correct.

Before concluding this brief notice of Shibli's prose works, I must mention his *Mawazina-i-Anis-*



*o-Dabir*. This book shows his great capacity as a literary critic. He understands all that criticism stands for in the literatures of the West, and sets about it in the spirit of a true scholar. In this book he has discussed the relative merits of the two great Lucknow writers of *marsia*. Those masters of Urdu verse devoted their lives to writing marsias. They were contemporaries and naturally rivals in fame. They were both great masters of style and used to read their own compositions in public. Each one of them had his own set of admirers, and the spirit of partisanship among the admirers developed to such an extent that the differences between the two literary sects rose almost to the pitch of religious differences. Shibli has compared the two writers and recognises the position of both as eminent, but he does not conceal the fact that his own inclination is in favour of Anis. He has given arguments in support of his view, illustrating his arguments by extracts from the writings of the two poets. This book was published in 1907 (Mufid-i-Am Press, Agra) and aroused considerable opposition in many quarters.

Having dealt with the more important of the prose-works of Shibli, I come to his poems. They are not very many, but they have an interesting history and are very significant. Shibli had been so engrossed in his literary pursuits that he had hardly given any thought to politics. Moreover his association with Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, who had tried to keep Moslems away from politics, may have had some thing to do with his own aloofness from political activities. His ideas on the subject,

however, changed after the death of Sir Syed and they underwent a further change, along with those of many other leaders of Moslem thought, in 1911, when it was announced that the partition of Bengal, which had repeatedly been declared to be a settled fact, was annulled. Shibli, like many others, began to believe in the efficacy of organised political agitation. The love of freedom was inborn in him and had been accentuated by his deep study of the literature of Arabia. It had been lying dormant in him for a considerable time. With the changed circumstances it kindled into a flame and he became one of the leaders of the liberal movement among the Moslems. He started writing short poems, relating to various incidents in the lives of the Prophet and his companions, with which his studies in Islamic history had rendered him familiar. He related in verse the well-known incident in the life of the Caliph Umar, when an Arab publicly challenged him for taking more than his individual share of cloth out of the booty taken in a campaign, and on being told that what seemed to be a larger share was the result of combining the share of Caliph Umar and his son, the Arab recognised that the Caliph was a just ruler and continued his allegiance to him. The object was to illustrate the absolute equality which prevailed among Moslems in the early days of Islam.

Another short poem which may be referred to in this connection is *Adl-i-Jahangiri*, in which Shibli describes how Jahangir, whose love for his queen, Nur Jahan, knew no bounds, once showed his great sense of justice and kingly duty in

ordering the execution of the sentence of death, which had been passed against Nur Jahan, by a Court, because a stranger had been killed by her by mistake. Jahangir did not cancel the order till the relatives of the deceased interceded on her behalf and accepted a large sum of money as a compensation, according to a doctrine of the Shariat (the law of Islam). These poems appeared at short intervals and were contributed to various newspapers and periodicals.

From these poems to others dealing with the political topics of the day was but a step and Shibli began to write about the National Congress and the Moslem League, and against political slavery. About this time there was trouble at Cawnpur in connection with a Mosque in which a number of Musulmans were killed as a result of firing by the police. This stirred the mind of Shibli and he wrote several poems, which were couched in strong words and were regarded by the authorities as objectionable and were suppressed by order. We are not concerned with the said order being justified or not, but I can say that as literature, pure and simple, apart from the views expressed in those poems, it is a pity that they were suppressed. As pieces of literature they deserved to live.

I may say a few words, before I finish, about his charming personality. He had a kind and affectionate heart and possessed an amiable and sweet nature. His pupils adored him and he loved them like his own sons and brothers. There was constant correspondence between him and them. He remained a student all his life and

most of his letters to his friends and pupils relate to literary matters. Syed Suleman Nadvi has collected a number of Shibli's letters and published them under the name of *Makatib-i-Shibli*. These are written in good Urdu and will repay perusal. They will also serve to throw light on some personal aspects of Shibli's life.

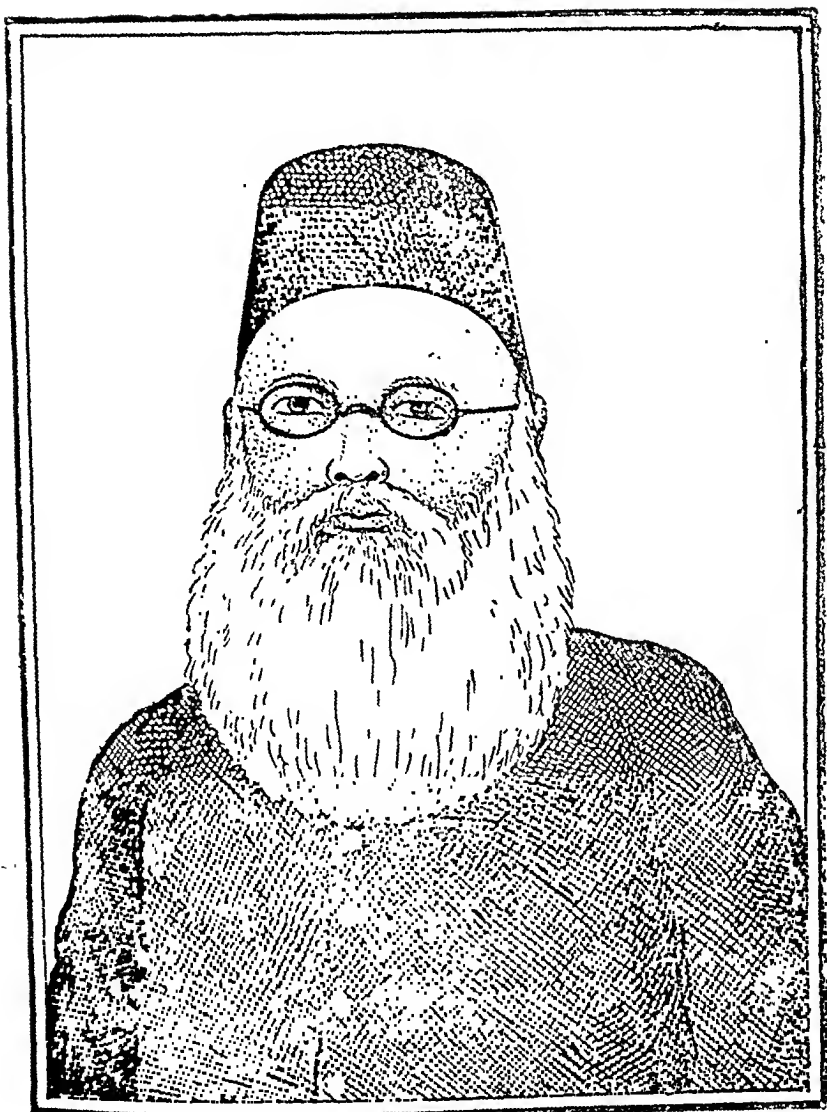
Shibli had taken great interest in the education and advancement of his younger brothers and, not having a son of his own, he devoted his love to them. The death of one of them, Maulvi Mohd. Ishaq, who was the ablest of them all, elicited from Shibli one of those spontaneous sobs in verse which by their pathos appeal to every heart and form the very essence of poetry. Similarly the lines, which he wrote about the accident which involved the amputation of one of his legs and made him lame for the remainder of his life, are very touching.

Shibli has left this world, but his works will long remain alive in the memory of his numerous admirers in India.

## Sharar Lukhnavi

Maulvi Abdul Halim, *Sharar*, and Pandit Rattan Nath, *Sarshar*, share the honour of being the best novelists of India. Maulvi Abdul Halim received his early education in a *maktab*, and later he had the advantage of studying in the famous seminary at Farangi Mahal in Lucknow. His maternal grand-father was one of the courtiers of Wajid Ali Shah, the last king of Oudh, and went with him to Calcutta, when the king was deposed. Young Abdul Halim thus got a chance of going to the then Metropolis of India with his grand-father. This contact with the princely family of Oudh, gave Abdul Halim an opportunity of cultivating his knowledge of elegant and idiomatic Urdu, which proved so helpful to him in the literary career which he subsequently adopted. He wrote verses under the *nom de plume* of *Sharar*, which means a "spark". He soon found that he could use his ability and talent in a manner more useful than writing love songs. He started life as a prose-writer and soon won a reputation for writing very attractive prose.

Maulana Bashir-ud-Din, Editor of *Albashir* of Etawah, who was a personal friend and admirer of *Sharar*, says in a sketch of *Sharar's* life published in the *Zamindar* of Lahore many years ago, that *Sharar* was influenced, to a great extent,



Moulvi Abdul Halim Sharar



by the writings of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, though he did not come very much in personal contact with the Syed. He and Sir Syed met one another perhaps only once or twice, but he was impressed very deeply by the articles contributed by the latter to the *Tehzib-ul-Akhlaq*.

In 1883 *Sharar* began his journalistic career by making literary contributions to the columns of the *Oudh Akhbar*. He had acquired a knowledge of English by self-study and had thus added greatly to his store of information about history and literature. It was the study of English which inspired him with a desire to serve Urdu through the medium of interesting fiction, written in the form adopted by novels written in English. The *Dilchasp* and the *Dilkash* were the two earliest stories written by *Sharar*. The style introduced by him became popular very soon and it found many imitators.

When the connection of *Sharar* with the *Oudh Akhbar* ceased in 1883-1884, the idea of his bringing out a monthly magazine in Urdu was suggested to him by his friend Maulvi Bashir-ud-Din. He accepted the suggestion and started his monthly journal, named *Dilgudaz*, which established his reputation as a distinguished writer of good prose and proved a paying concern. He was thus enabled to earn an independent living and to publish his famous novels.

One of the best productions of *Sharar* is the novel called *Malik Al Aziz* and *Vergina*, describing the battles between Christians and Moslems during the period of the crusades. *Sharar* has interwoven with the history of the battles the romantic love



between a young Moslem hero and a charming Christian Princess. The story is full of interesting adventures. The novel enjoyed great popularity and laid the foundation of the historical novel in Urdu. Another novel of *Sharar*, dealing with a historical theme nearer home is *Mansur Mohina*. It was followed by a charming story called *Flora Florinda*, the plot of which is derived from a narrative relating to the days of the Moorish reign in Spain. *Hasan Angelina* is another readable novel, based on a story relating to the Russo-Turkish war.

The stories above named are novels in the strict sense of the term. There were some well-known tales in Urdu before; but they were full of superstitions dealing with *talismans* and giants and evil spirits. The stories of Maulvi Nazeer Ahmad, who is another great writer of fiction belonging to the Delhi School, were true to life, but they were without any exciting plot. Though they were useful and instructive, they lacked the element of romance, which constitutes the main attraction of the novel.

The novels of Pandit Rattan Nath Sarshar, the great contemporary of *Sharar*, are in some respects even more interesting than those of *Sharar* and parts of them compare favourably with some of the best writers of the West, but their unwieldy length stands in the way of their recognition as model specimens of the novel. I think, therefore, that the credit of being the first writer of novels in Urdu belongs to *Sharar*, who appears to have taken the historical romances of Sir Walter Scott as models for his works of fiction.

He could have hardly gone to a better source for inspiration for fiction with a historical basis. I am not in a position to say how far he was in touch with the writings of Scott at the time when he began to write historical novels. He may have had an opportunity of studying the works of Scott when he went to England, as a companion and tutor to the sons of the then Prime Minister of Hyderabad Deccan, Nawab Sir *Viqarul Umara*.

In choosing Islamic history as the back ground of the pen-pictures which *Sharar* wanted to paint, he followed not only his natural bent of mind towards the study of history, but went with the spirit of the time in which his writings began. The strong impetus given to the knowledge of Islamic history by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the rousing appeals of Hali to the past glories of Islam and the research works of Maulana Shibli, had deeply stirred the mind of Moslems and had turned their thoughts to a study of the history of Islam. *Sharar* saw that if he could dress some facts of history in the garb of fiction, adding imaginary plots here and there, to add to the zest of his books, he would be rendering a service not only to Urdu literature, but would also help to popularise the study of history. It was with this double object that he started his writings, and, it can hardly be denied that his efforts were crowned with success.

The literary activities of *Sharar* were temporarily interrupted on account of his going to England. The *Dilgudaz* had to suspend publication for several years and there were no fresh books from the pen of *Sharar*, but men like him,

who are imbued with the true spirit of serving literature, do not give up their work even when circumstances are not quite favourable to the achievement of their desire. So *Sharar* kept up his study of history, during this period of comparative retirement from active literary life. When he returned to Lucknow he started again the publication of the *Dilgudaz*. The announcement of the re-appearance of his popular journal was hailed with delight by its old admirers, but the Deccan called him once more and the second period of the publication of the *Dilgudaz* did not last long.

When *Sharar* went to Hyderabad for the second time, he was given an office which suited him particularly. He was to supervise the department of *tasnif-o-talif*, that is the work of literary compilations in the State. This gave him an opportunity of intimate contacts with many well-known literary men who were residing in Hyderabad. Out of them the poet *Dagh* and *Maulana Shibli*, deserve special mention. He also received a commission from His Exalted Highness the Nizam to write a complete History of Islam and was allowed to carry on this work comfortably at his home town. He returned to Lucknow and started his journal *Dilgudaz* for the third time. *Maulana Bashir-ud-Din* states that *Sharar* completed the first volume of his History of Islam and sent his manuscript to Hyderabad, but he does not know whether the book was published or not. He says that he had been shown some portions of the book by *Sharar* and had found them very interesting.

*Sharar* was a prolific writer and is said to have written about a hundred books, but he did not derive sufficient pecuniary gain from them. It is said that many publishers published his books in very cheap editions and made money for themselves, instead of looking to the interests of the author, but he was too busy to look after the business side of his literary work. Besides being a literary man, Maulvi Abdul Halim was a social reformer. He had strong opinions on the existenee of the *pardah* system among Moslem women and wanted to bring out a radical change in the society of his day. For many years he ventilated his opinions in a newspaper, called the *Parda-i-Ismat*, which he started with this object. He met with great opposition on this subject from the orthodox and conservative sections of society and his newspaper did not receive much encouragement, but he succeeded in making an impression on people who had received Western education. They gradually introduced modifications in the seclusion of women as prevailing in Moslem families and some of them have now decided to follow the line advocated by *Sharar* and to allow their women to be fully free from *pardah*.

As an advocate of female emancipation *Sharar* naturally laid great stress on the education of girls and in that respect also his views have influenced a large number of people, though he was not listened to much at the time when he was preaching them.

Maulvi Abdul Halim does not count for much as a poet. He could have shone in poetry if he had adopted that line of writing, but he preferred

prose and raised it to a high level. He tried to introduce blank verse in Urdu poetry, but time was not ripe for it then. This idea, therefore, did not become popular in his time, but he can be regarded as the fore-runner of what is now called the progressive school of Urdu verse.

After serving the cause of literature and learning, *Sharar* passed away at the ripe age of seventy, in 1926 A. D. His death was widely mourned in the literary circles of India and it was felt that Urdu literature had lost in him one of its greatest benefactors.





Pandit Ratan Nath Sarshar

## Pandit Ratan Nath Sarshar

In a short essay on the writings of Pt. Ratan Nath Sarshar which was included in my booklet, called "The New School of Urdu Literature", I paid the following tribute to this great writer of Urdu fiction :—

"He is a man with a marvellous power of observation of minute detail and gifted with a vast experience of every phase of life which he has tried to depict in his books. His descriptions are word pictures in which we see all classes of the Lucknow society moving before our eyes in an unending panorama not in a dumb show with mere gestures, but endowed with the power of speech supplying a chorus for the ear as well"

The novelist was alive and at the height of his fame, when the above tribute was paid to him by one who was a young student of Urdu literature. A few years after the above words were written, the cruel hand of death deprived our country of the services of this great master of Urdu prose, early in the beginning of the present century, in 1902. Years have gone by and I have since read a lot more of Urdu literature but my admiration for Sarshar, the author of the *Fisana-i-Azad* has not diminished. I think our language owes a lasting debt of gratitude to



Pandit Ratan Nath. He is undoubtedly a pioneer in novel writing in Urdu.

An interesting sketch of his life from the pen of Pt. Brij narain *Chakbast* appeared in the *Kashmir Drapan* and was subsequently reproduced in the *Zamana* of Cawnpore. I am indebted to that article for some of the details of the life of Pandit Ratan Nath. He was born in Lucknow. According to *Chakbast* the exact date of his birth is not known, but Mr. R. B. Saxena, in his history of Urdu, literature has given it as 1847 or 1848. He was only four years old when he lost his father, Pt. Baij Nath *Dar*. This Brahman family had originally migrated from Kashmir. Like most Kashmiri Brahmans of those days Ratan Nath received a liberal education in Persian and also learnt some Arabic. There were several respectable Muslim families residing in the neighbourhood of the house of the parents of Ratan Nath and as a young boy he had frequent opportunities of contact with the ladies of those families and of hearing the Urdu language as spoken in the best Urdu speaking homes. He himself acknowledged that he owed his facile use of Urdu to the chance he had in his childhood of moving freely in those homes and learning the language in its purity, undefiled by heavy foreign words. When he grew up he had the advantage of studying English. He joined the Canning College of Lucknow, which was established for imparting modern education. He could not complete his College studies, but he came out of the College with a fair knowledge of English, which he improved afterwards by self-study and which was turned to great advantage

by him later in life, in his journalistic and literary career.

Ratan Nath began life as a teacher in the District School at Kheri, but finding that the work of teaching young boys was not the vocation for which he was meant by nature, he diverted his attention to literature. His earliest contributions appeared in a monthly magazine started by the Kashmiri Pandit community, which was known as the *Murasala-i-Kashmir*. The artificial style of Rajab Ali Saroor, the author of *Fisana-i-Ajaib*, was in vogue in those days in Lucknow and Ratan Nath imitated the same for some time but he soon gave it up in favour of a natural style of writing, which he eventually made his own. The first specimens of his new style appeared in the *Oudh Punch*, a humorous journal of Lucknow, made famous by Munshi Sajjad Husain, who was the first writer to introduce wit and humour in Urdu periodicals. He found in Ratan Nath a person who was also gifted by nature with a sense of humour and they became great friends and co-workers. It is stated that their mutual relations were strained some years afterwards when some adverse criticism of the writings of Sarshar began to appear in the *Oudh Punch*, but their good relations were restored shortly afterwards through the interventions of some common friends.

Pt. Ratan Nath in his early days was a freelance journalist. He contributed to many journals besides the *Oudh Punch*, among which the *Mirat-ul-Hind* and the *Riazul Akhbar* may be particularly mentioned. Urdu translation of some scientific books written in English were also published by

him. One of these was a book on physics, called *Shamsul Zaha*, which received considerable appreciation at the time. When the late Munshi Nival Kishore, who was the most enterprising publisher of his day of Urdu and Persian books, heard of the rising fame of Pandit Ratan Nath and saw some specimens of his style, he invited him to edit the *Oudh Akhbar*. It was an Urdu daily published at Lucknow. In the capable hands of Pt. Ratan Nath the *Oudh Akhbar* became the leading newspaper of the day. The editor started writing a series of humorous stories to add to the attraction of the paper. These stories were the nucleus round which the structure of the voluminous novel, *Fisana-i-Azad* was subsequently built. The basic theme of the story is (based on a "Don Quixote" the famous novel of the Spanish writer Cervantes. The hero of the novel to whom the name of *Azad* is given is a chivalrous knight errant, shaped after Don Quixote Khoji the faithful attendant of Azad is an Indianised model of Sancho Panza, who accompanied Don Quixote in his adventures. We are told by Chakbast that the idea of producing in Urdu a story on the lines of Don Quixote was suggested to *Sarshar* by a friend of his Pt. Tir Bhawan Nath, who was himself a literary man with the *Nom-de-plume* of *Hijr*. This suggestion was accepted by *Sarshar*. The names of Azad and Khoji have become household words in every part of India, where Urdu is read. The hero and his attendant are both unusual personalities, but the art of the author has clothed them with reality so that the reader of the book regards them as living

characters and feels in sympathy with the triumphs of the hero and laughs at the empty heroics of Khoji, his boastful attendant, who comes to grief at every step, in spite of all his boasts of past bravery and soldierly experience.

The *Fisana-i-Azad* is a book of four large volumes. This is at once a defect and a merit. The defect is the lack of coherence in the story and the merit is the marvellous flow of the pen of the novelist. He had read numerous English novels, and digested them. What had appealed to him most in the course of his reading was consciously or unconsciously woven into the series of stories, which are contained in the *Fisana*. The idea of imitating the speech of people in humble walks of life must have been borrowed by him from Dickens and was successfully worked in reproducing the forms of speech of persons of different classes of society in Lucknow. I read this book for the first time in my school days and was under its spell for a long time.

It is a pity that Pt. Ratan Nath had to write his best book in the form of daily contributions to a newspaper, but the lack of coherence, caused by this process, is compensated, to some extent, by the freedom enjoyed by the author in frequent changes of scene and action.

The *Fisana* was widely welcomed as soon as it was printed in book form, and interesting passages culled out of it have adorned many a book of selections from Urdu literature, which have been used as Text Books in Schools and Colleges. A number of small books consisting of

selections from the *Fisana* were prepared by a literary society in Lahore, which was founded by Shamsul-Ulma Maulana Tajwar, for presenting to the Urdu reading public the best specimens of Urdu prose and poetry. These books were published by Messrs. Attar Chand Kapoor & Sons of Lahore, a well-known firm of Publishers.

It is interesting to note that the service rendered to Urdu literature by *Sarshar* received a sincere recognition from one of his best known contemporaries, Maulvi Abdul Halim *Sharar*. Chakbast has reproduced a letter of *Sharar* in Urdu, which is to the following effect :—

“By writing the *Fisana-i-Azad* you have acted as a Messiah for Urdu language and have put a new life into it. . . . . It is so heartening that you are a helper of our old and good but unbefriended language. I thank God for this. How can I show my appreciation, except by sending you a few verses, in the last line of which the date of the publication of your book is brought out.”

The three lines of Urdu verse, which were sent by *Sharar* to Pt. Ratan Nath may be translated in prose as follows :—

“You have admirably struck a new path in fiction and have used numerous idioms with great effect. Friend and foe have both acknowledged the power of your pen, with this difference, that friends said “Wah” (bravo), and foes said “Ah” (alas). *Sharar* presents you a line from which the year of publication can be extracted and admires your writing, which reads like a talk.”

The date yielded by the words "Ratan Nath *Wah Wah*" in the last line, is 1298 A. H., which is equivalent to 1881, of the Christian era.

The above extract of the opinion of *Sharar* shows that both these famous writers of good Urdu recognized the worth of one another. It is a pity that later on a controversy started as to the relative merits of these two benefactors of Urdu literature. Without any intention on my part to start such controversy, my booklet referred to above, was responsible for it. There was a chapter in that booklet on *Sharar* along with the chapter on Ratan Nath *Sarshar*. I had given due praise to both of them, but the following observations of mine were misunderstood by some of the admirers of Pt. Ratan Nath. The following passage formed part of the opinion expressed by me in my Essay:—

"To *Sharar* I believe belongs the credit of being the first novelist in Urdu, in the true sense of the term. . . . The only other writer contending for rivalry with *Sharar* as the originator of the Urdu novel can be his own Lucknow contemporary, Pt. Ratan Nath. He called his *Fisana-i-Azad* a novel and his subsequent writings great and small were also called novels. In simplicity of style and in picturing Lucknow life the Pandit's books deserve to be classed as novels. The trouble, however, is that the more important of them are so unweildy in length that the plot, though capable of being interesting, grows obscure and leaves no impression of a continued story upon the mind."

My criticism was not meant to take away any part of the credit due to Pt. Ratan Nath as a pioneer, nor to detract from the great value of his contribution to Urdu literature, but simply to bring out the fact that a novel, in the true sense of the term, is expected to have a regular plot and to be much less voluminous than the *Fisana-i-Azad*. Pt. Bishan Narain Dar, a leading lawyer of Lucknow and a friend and relative of Pt. Ratan Nath, first joined issue with me regarding the above criticism and wrote to a Lucknow paper, conducted in English, supporting the claims of Sarshar to superiority over Sharar. Some other writers wrote in the columns of a paper, conducted in Lahore, claiming that Sharar deserved a higher praise than Sarshar. In my opinion the controversy was not justified. The fact is that the spheres of the two writers differ so much from one another and the style of each one of them, though charming in itself, has very little in common. Similarly the services rendered by each of them to the growth of prose literature in Urdu are great in their respective spheres, but afford no common basis of comparison. I have made a passing reference to this old controversy, as it has occasionally been revived by critics, otherwise it is practically set at rest by the words quoted above from Maulvi Abdul Halim Sharar himself, recognising the work and worth of Sarshar.

Pt. Ratan Nath wrote many other books of Urdu fiction of which the *Sair-i-Kohsar* and the *Jam-i-Sarshar* deserve special mention, but they do not come up to the level of the *Fisana-i-Azad*, though the author keeps up the general excellence

of his style. A number of short stories were also published by Sarshar, but they did not add in any way to the reputation which he had earned by his first book.

About 1895 Pt. Ratan Nath went to Hyderabad Deccan, which has always attracted famous writers of Urdu, as it has invariably extended its patronage to them. Pt. Ratan Nath had gone to Madras as a member of the Indian National Congress. On his return he visited Hyderabad. He has given an interesting account of this visit in a paper called *Kashmir Parkash*, from which the following extract is translated:—

“The members of the Hindu and Muslim gentry and the public in general have given me a cordial welcome. Maharaja Kishan Parshad, who is at present the War Minister of the State Army, and who has held the office of *Madarul Maham* has appointed me to correct his writings in prose and poetry on a salary of Rs. 200/- a month. If any verse of mine pleases him he gives me a gold Mohar as a reward. He also grants Khilat, etc., three or four times during the year. I have had the privilege of presenting my books and the *nazar* to the Nizam. He knew all about me already. For about an hour he sat reading the *Sair-i-Kohsar*. He then looked at the *Jam-i-Sharar* and said to his A. D. C. ‘I have already read this novel and it is in my Library’ . . . My name has been included among the Darbaris of the court, and it is likely that a Mansab (permanent



allowance) may be awarded to me, which may be made hereditary... A new novel of mine called *Gor-i-Ghariban* will, God willing, be published in a fortnight".

Owing to the welcome received by Sarshar in the court of the Deccan, the optimism of his letter quoted above appears to have been quite natural, but Fate had willed otherwise. Proposals about allowances took time to mature and before the goal could be attained, his health began to fail and his untimely death put an end to his hopes and the aspirations of his friends about him. It is not known whether the novel which was expected to come out ever saw the light. The name chosen by him for it that is "the grave of exiles" remained as a sort of epitaph for his last remains in Hyderabad.

Sarshar passed away on the 27th January 1902, at the age of 55 or 56. In his youth he was a tall, fairly well built and handsome man, known for his smiling face, his ready wit and his power to entertain his hearers with his interesting talk and with humorous quotations from the writings of famous poets, but towards the end of his life in Hyderabad he was a very different man, consumed by slow fever and reduced to a comparative skeleton. He could scarcely digest any food. It is stated that he had unfortunately taken to drinking in his youth and when the habit grew, he could not shake it off. It became one of the banes of his life. We are told by Chakbast that even Maharaja Kishan Parshad

withdrew his patronage from Sarshar towards the latter part of his career in the Deccan.

This tragic end of such a brilliant writer is painful. Those who knew him say that the fertility of his brain had also suffered during the time that he spent in Hyderabad. In one of his poems, which he wrote for the Kashmiri Conference, he has addressed a few lines to himself showing that he regretted the decline of the power of his pen. The lines are to the following effect (in translation):—

“It is a thousand pities that thou didst not realize thy own value with the gifts which thou had. The former brilliance of thy writings is gone. The damsel of thy literary productions has lost the rose-like glow on her cheeks. The strength of thy memory and the power of comprehension has diminished. How could it last, as every thing has its limits”.

The *nom-de-plume* of Sarshar, which Pt. Ratan Nath had chosen in his youth, proved an unhappy choice. The word “Sarshar” means an “inebriated person”. The augury unfortunately came true. He has, however, left a name in Urdu literature which will not be forgotten.

A feature of Sarshar's life deserving special mention is that he was singularly free of any racial or communal feeling. The Hindus and the Muslims were the same in his eyes and in cultural tastes he had more in common with his Muslim friends. He used to wear a Turkish cap which

was the popular head dress of the Muslims in those days. In all the photographs that I have seen of him, he is wearing a Fez, but one distinction was noticeable that his cap was without tassel. It is difficult to say whether it was by chance that this tassel had dropped or whether the lack of it was meant as a distinguishing mark. In literature, however, there was hardly anything besides his name to show that his novels were the composition of a Hindu author. X

THE END

